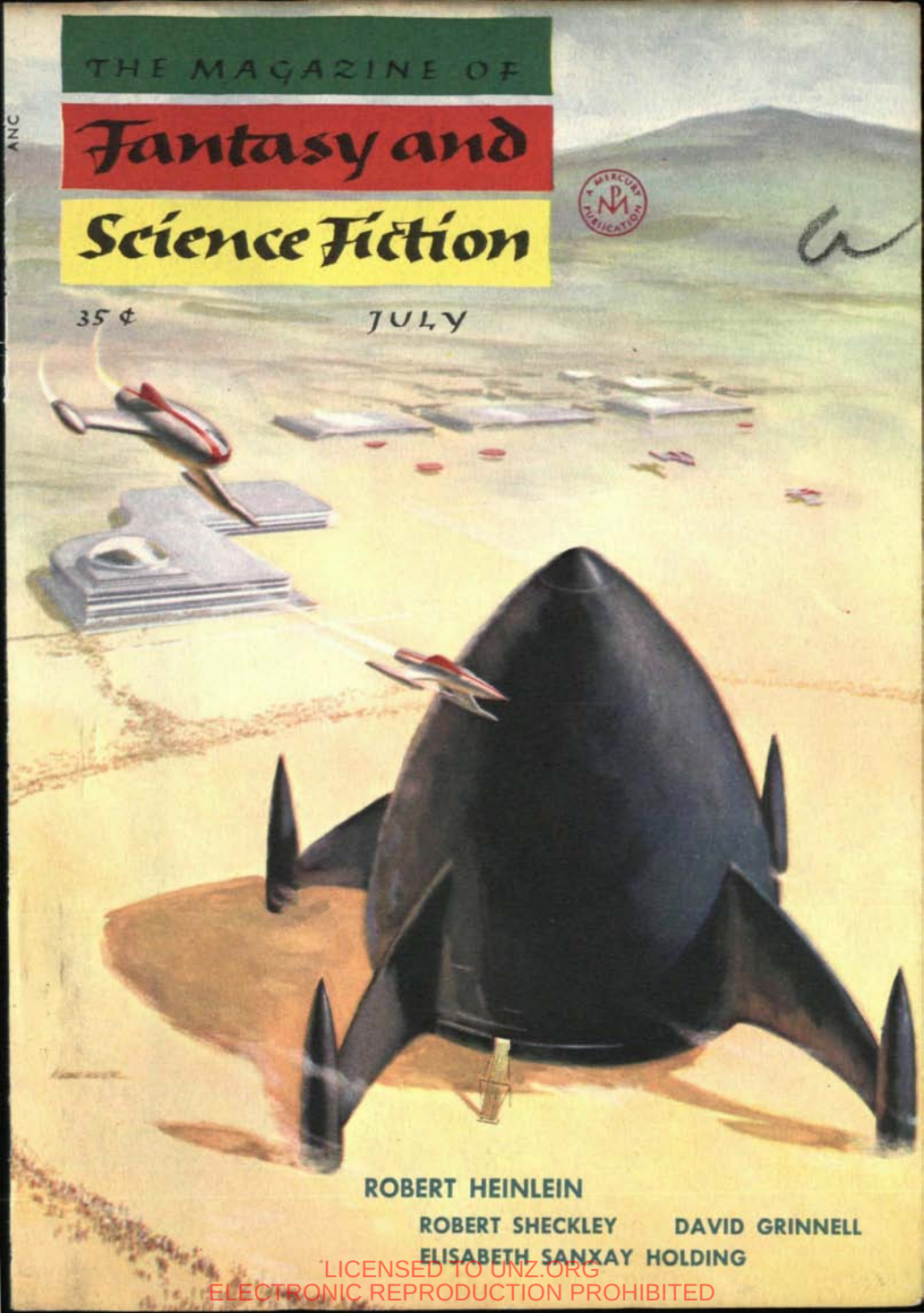

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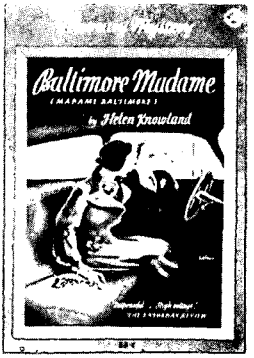

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 7, No. 1 JULY

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(from Star Lummox, by Robert A. Heinlein)

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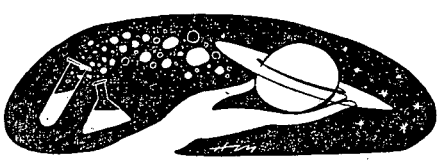

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Shadow of Wings

by ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK SOLOVIOFF

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon of a happy day that Stan Dickson first saw the shadow. He had just finished clipping the hedge, and he was sitting on the steps that led up to the veranda, looking out at the little tidal creek across the road. There was a small boat yard there, and an elderly man was using a hammer, with a clinking sound; down the street, someone was mowing a lawn. Celia was upstairs, putting the children to bed; he could hear her voice, and little Jenie's voice, loud and urgent; Jenie was four years old now, and filled with an almost desperate impatience. It no longer satisfied her to listen to a bedtime story; she wanted to compose her own, with someone to listen.

It made him smile to hear the jumbled story in that loud little voice, a bad wolf, a bad, *bad* witch, a naughty little rabbit, a good fairy, a beautiful princess. He took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit one; he smoked, well-pleased with his own life and with the tranquil Summer world. Maybe by the time little Pete grows up, there won't be any more wars.

The orange sun was swimming above the horizon, in a pale-green sky, throwing a fiery bar across the gray-green water of the creek. The old man's hammer clinked, but the lawn mower had stopped, and Jenie's voice had died away. There was another sound, somewhere in the offing; a plane, he thought, and watched for it. And then the shadow came across the face of the sun, a great flock of birds, some small, some with great wide wings beating. He

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heard a mewing cry, like that of a gull, he heard a fluty twitter, another unknown note; then they went sweeping past, and out of sight.

City-bred, he knew next to nothing about birds, and he frowned at the queer uneasiness that stirred in him. Damn nonsense! he told himself. Maybe this is the time of year they migrate; something of the sort, something perfectly natural.

He finished his cigarette, and went into the house. Celia was in the kitchen, beginning to dish up their early dinner. Libby was coming to sit with the babies, and they were going to the movies in the nearby town; they had made this a part of their sedate and cheerful routine. Stan did not mention the birds to Celia, but when she had gone upstairs to dress, he strolled into the kitchen where young Libby was washing the dishes. A nice girl she was, rosy and good-tempered.

"You know about these things," he said. "Do a lot of different kinds of birds often fly together in the same flock?"

"My *goodness!*" cried Libby. "Don't talk to *me* about *birds*, Mr. Dickson! My uncle Joe — he's got a truck farm, you know — why, he's creating and carrying on about the birds, from morning till night."

"Mean they're eating up the crops?" Stan asked, a little uncertainly. Because what did he know about birds? Only that farmers put up scarecrows, didn't they, to keep birds away?

"Oh, it's *lots* worse than that!" said Libby. "Why, it's even in the papers, Mr. Dickson, and the Government's sending people to find out about it. You see, the birds just aren't coming at all!"

"Coming where?"

"They aren't coming *anywhere*," Libby explained. "The crops are dying, and the trees are dying, because the birds aren't killing any of the insects. Why, you wouldn't believe how bad things are getting! The flowers, and even the grass . . ."

"I didn't know that birds were so useful," said Stan. "Maybe that's why our garden is so — let's call it unspectacular. Why have the birds quit on the job, Libby?"

"Nobody knows," she said. "Haven't you read about it in the papers, Mr. Dickson? Or heard people talking about it?"

"Well," said Stan, "the people in an advertising agency don't seem to talk much about birds."

"They'd ought to," said Libby, severely. "My father, and my Uncle Joe, and everybody, they all say there'll be a real famine in this country, in a few months, if the birds don't come back and kill the insects — worms, and beetles, and caterpillars, and goodness knows what — why, they're crawling all over the place."

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"But I saw a big flock of birds, just a little while ago."

"I know," said Libby. "Everybody sees them — the biggest flocks of birds that ever came over here. Only, they don't *stop*. Not a one of them."

"But why not? They have to eat something somewhere, don't they?"

"Well . . ." Libby said. "Of course, I don't know if there's anything to it, but — well . . . some people say it's the Russians."

Stan bent his head, and flicked an ash off his sleeve, fighting back a grin.

"How would they manage that?" he asked, with polite earnestness.

"Well, I don't understand much about things like that," Libby answered. "But my father, he thinks they —" She paused, and putting her hands behind her, she leaned back against the sink. "What he calls it is '*deflecting*,' " she said. "Pop says that could be done, maybe. Something could be sort of sprinkled down from planes, something that would keep birds away."

Stan looked at her with a faint frown, a little impressed by her tone, and words. But only for a moment. Now, look here! he said to himself. These Russians "deflecting" the birds . . . Come, come!

He went upstairs to wash, and when he came down, Celia was waiting for him. "Hello, Perfect!" he said to her, and he thought that she was just that, a tall girl, straight and proud, in a tailored white cotton dress that well set off her olive skin, her long dark eyes, her rich dark hair. She was handsome, she was intelligent, she was good-tempered, and she was superbly capable, as a mother, a housekeeper, an organizer. He was certain of a good dinner, and served on time.

"Celia," he said, "have you heard any talk in the village about birds?"

"Not in the village," she said. "But the old man from the boat yard stopped me in the street yesterday. He's a very nice old fellow, you know, and he often stops to speak to the children. But yesterday I couldn't get away from him. He went on and on about how the fish were gettin 'out of control,' he called it. I couldn't quite follow him, but as far as I could make out, the gulls and the other sea-birds had stopped catching fish, and the inlet, he said, is teeming with them. And some species, that the birds used to eat, are getting so numerous they're crowding out the others. He was very much worried. He said the balance of nature was being upset."

"I wouldn't know. . . ." said Stan. "Maybe nature changes its balances now and then. Think so?"

"Stan, I'm just a child of the city streets. I don't know about nature. Only, I've read that when new species are introduced into a place, they can do a lot of harm. Rabbits in Australia, for instance."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I've heard of things like that. You think, then, that maybe some new species of bird has come here, or been brought here, that's driving out all the other kinds?"

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"Stan, I'm afraid I didn't take the old man's talk very seriously. Is it serious?"

"I don't know. We might take a look in the evening paper," he said.

"Do you think it's important enough to be in the newspapers?"

"Probably not," he said.

He wanted it not to be that important; he wanted to laugh at the whole thing. But it was there, on an inside page, and he realized that the heading was one which, even this morning, he would have skipped without reading.

SCIENTISTS STUDYING BIRD MYSTERY.

> Scientists from the Department of Agriculture have asked the assistance of ornithologists in making a survey of the changed habits recently observed in the bird life of the New England States, and now reported to be spreading rapidly to other parts of the country.
>
> The birds, which are an important factor in insect-control, have within recent weeks ceased to destroy various pests which formerly constituted their normal diet, and in consequence reports are pouring in to the Department of Agriculture of ruined crops, and, in some localities, of valuable timber forests succumbing to blights.
>
> Unusually large flocks of birds, frequently composed of species hitherto regarded as inimical to one another, have been reported as flying over many areas, in a northwesterly direction. Observation planes report having occasionally seen these large flocks halting for brief periods of time in barren and inaccessible tracts, and then continuing their mysterious pilgrimages.
>
> Scientists admit that at present they are at a loss to explain these unprecedented and increasingly serious phenomena.

BATS REPORTED JOINING BIRDS

> Observers in Ohio report that vast numbers of bats have been seen flying in the wake of the great bird migrations. Mosquitoes in that region, formerly the prey of bats, are increasing to the dimensions of a plague. . . .

There was more about grasshoppers, and worms, boll weevils, caterpillars, other insects with names unknown to Stan; he glanced through them, and handed the newspaper to Celia. She read it, frowning a little.

"Well . . ." she said. "The scientists will find something — some new sort of spray to control the insects."

"They'd better," said Stan.

But lying awake that night, he remembered the flock of birds he had seen that afternoon, the cries he had heard, the sweep of wide wings, the flutter

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of small ones, the inexorable onward rush of this multitude, and he was filled with wonder and dismay.

The next day, people were talking about birds in the office. "Too damn bad the pigeons don't go away with the rest of them," Anderson said. "We could do without them, all right, but they're still around."

"But only in parks, and places where they're fed by human beings," said Miss Zeller, the receptionist. "It said so, on the radio."

"Very good; there's the solution," said Anderson. "If people want the birds back, then feed 'em. Strew bread crumbs all over the place, and whatever else they eat."

"No, but we need them to destroy *insects!*" said Miss Zeller, indignantly.

"Well, they've gone on strike," said Anderson. "They're tired of eating insects, and worms. I don't blame them."

There were other people who took his joking tone about the matter; there were others who showed a serious, but quite academic interest. But more and more people were growing worried.

When Stan went out to lunch, in a little restaurant near the office, the waitress brought him a menu with an anxious smile.

"There's an awful lot of things crossed out," she said. "But it just seems like things didn't come in to the market this morning."

Green peas. Crossed out. Corn on the cob. Out. Strawberry shortcake. Out. Purple lines through one item after another.

"They say it's the birds," said the waitress. "They're eating up everything —or something like that. Well, I guess the scientists will fix *that* up."

The evening newspaper Stan opened in the train had an article by a scientist, an ornithologist. It was, he said, erroneous to speak of the present phenomenon as a "migration."

> Our birds have not, in any area under observation, deserted their natural habitat, nor are they anywhere less numerous than usual. Nidification is normal. The remarkably large flocks of birds, comprising species never before observed in association, make from one to two flights daily, leaving their customary areas at fairly definite times, and returning after a fairly definite interval, ranging from three to eight or nine hours.
>
> The disturbing factor in these hitherto unexplained movements is that the birds are no longer feeding upon the insects and grubs which normally constitute their diet, and, in consequence, the Insecta are menacing crops, orchards, and all forms of plant life.
>
> It has been suggested that our birds are now being fed by what in marine life is known as "plankton." In the ocean, this consists of a

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continual rain of more or less invisible matter, drifting down from the surface through various strata of the sea, and providing nourishment for an amazing variety of marine life. It is suggested that some cosmic disturbance is causing a similar condition in the atmosphere, so that in certain regions the birds are now receiving sustenance from the air, ample and varied enough to satisfy their needs.

The man sitting beside Stan in the smoker had a different newspaper, and a different theory. "This fellow —" he said. "This scientist — he says here that experiments with the atom bomb have produced a radiation which makes insects poisonous to birds. And he says, 'Unless we can immediately find some effective method of insect extermination, this planet which we inhabit will become a desert.' The insects, he says, are going to take over."

Celia was on the veranda with the two children when he got home. "What's up?" he asked, surprised by this variation in routine; the children were always upstairs being put to bed at this hour.

"I wanted to see the birds," Celia said. "Stan, look! Here they come!"

They were visible now above the woodland across the inlet; they came sweeping on, across the face of the setting sun, casting a shadow on the calm green water; they flew over the road and past the house, mewing, twittering, honking, wide wings flapping, tiny wings spinning.

"Chickie . . . ?" said little Pete.

"Those aren't *chickens*," said his sister, scornfully. "They're big, big, *big* owls, and they eat little bunnies and —"

"Come on, children!" said Celia.

Libby was not here this evening, but Celia, as usual, had everything organized. She came downstairs, neat and fresh and pretty. But Stan, who knew her so well, saw something new in her face.

"Was it hot in the city, Stan?" she asked.

"Hot enough," he said. "What's on your mind, Perfect?"

"Oh . . . Well . . . The dairy sent around a notice that they'll have to cut down the milk supply, starting tomorrow. 'The destruction of large areas of pasture land by insects has seriously affected the production of milk in our herds.' But you don't catch *me* napping, no, sir! I had a bright idea. Right away, as soon as the notice came in the mail, I took the children in the car, and drove down to the village to buy up some cases of canned milk. Only, other mothers had had the same idea, all the mothers in a twenty-five mile radius. It was — absolutely primitive, Stan! All of us fighting for cases of evaporated milk, telling how many children we had, and how extra-delicate they were, and then bidding against each other, offering two, three, five times the regular prices."

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"But you got some," he said.

"Yes. Only, I don't like to remember how — how *fierce* I was. And the price . . . ! Stan, I'm sorry, but I haven't got a very nice dinner for you. I couldn't get any tomatoes, or lettuce, or green vegetables —"

"Take it easy, Cecily," he said, uneasy himself to see how disturbed she was under her air of good-humored amusement.

"And meat is getting scarce, too," she said. "And eggs. Stan, we'd better dig down into the old sock, and buy enormous stores — of everything."

"Yes . . ." he said.

But you can't beat the game, he thought. If it's going to be like that, we haven't that kind of money.

After dinner Cecily got a news broadcast on the radio. Experts in the nation's capital predict an early solution to the so-called 'bird-mystery' . . . In the meantime, citizens are urged to take immediate steps to control insects by thoroughly spraying all dwellings and outbuildings. Then foreign news, domestic politics, and then a little human interest story, told in the commentator's celebrated whimsical style.

"From Vermont. A farmer, Leonard Bogardus, was arrested early today for firing a shotgun from the roof of his barn at Department of Agriculture planes. 'They came once before to spray that stuff all over my land,' Mr. Bogardus told representatives of the press, 'and after they had gone, I wrote to Washington, and I saw the mayor of Stoneham, that is our township, and I warned them that I would not let them come again. I tacked signs up on the trees, and one on the chimney. Planes Keep Out. Last time they came, their dratted spray killed my heifer and my cat and her kittens, and there isn't a *leaf* left on my fruit trees. No, sir! I'll fight these plaguy insects my own way. They don't do near as much harm as them scientists and their poisons.' Well, folks, the Spirit of Seventy-six seems to be still alive in Vermont."

And later. "Stop: Over three hundred deaths have been reported throughout the country from insecticides. The great majority of the victims are children, but some adults have succumbed after eating fruit or vegetables coated with certain sprays. The public is seriously warned to take every precaution —"

"Oh, switch it off!" said Celia. "Let's get some music, something silly. It's — the whole thing is probably exaggerated. And anyhow, the scientists will cope with it."

"The scientists," Anderson said the next morning in the office, "are a damn sight more of a menace than the bugs."

"They're the *only* hope we have!" said Miss Zeller. "They're just doing everything they can think of. They're sending planes to follow the flocks

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of birds to find out where they go, but the birds get scared and go into the the woods. I — well, honestly, I'm *frightened.*"

So was everyone else, whether frankly or secretly. The threat was developing with dreadful speed. There was something close to a panic in Wall Street as the stocks of the giant meat-packing and canning companies plummeted downward. And the lumber companies, the paper manufacturers, the publishing and textile companies were shaky.

The food situation had grown appallingly dangerous. The government issued stern warnings about hoarding; Congress was asked to rush through a bill imposing penalties for this, and authorizing a system of emergency rationing. In the meantime, prices rose and rose; Stan paid three dollars for his lunch of a ham sandwich, a cup of coffee, a piece of apple pie.

He read an evening newspaper over this lunch, read it with a cold and leaden fear. Red Cross Rushing Food Supplies to Cities. The first call had come from Pittsburgh, followed almost at once by New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle. Speculators had hurried to buy up all available food supplies, dealers were charging fantastic prices, 'the low-income groups' were unable to pay for what few staples were left. There were babies without milk, sick people without nourishment; riots were reported here and there. A meeting of scientists, including ornithologists, meteorologists —

That's it, Stan said to himself. That's the matter with us, today. We all believe there are experts around, to fix up anything and everything. Soil erosion, rivers deflected, droughts, forests destroyed, natural resources wasted away. Never mind. Scientists will make food, control soil, or water. Plagues? Let 'em come; polio, flu, anything. Scientists will cope with them. They'll also deal with crime, insanity, sex, family rows.

But we're trained to look for an expert, in any sort of trouble. Don't try to do anything for yourself, ever. Don't monkey with the buzz-saw. Don't you try to fix your own television set; you'll spoil it. Don't you try to figure out what sort of education and training your own children need. You'll ruin their lives. Call in a psychiatrist.

This is famine. Here and now. You've heard about it. You've read about it. But you thought it was something in Oriental countries, or something from the Dark Ages. Here it is. Here and now. Famine means death, and plagues, riots, insanity, and chaos. It's worse than earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tidal waves, because it's slower. But don't *you* try to do anything, little man. *You* can't do anything. Can't grow your own food, or go hunting for it, can't make your own clothes, build your own shelter. Can't even work for a living, unless someone else runs a train or a bus for you, and installs electric lights and telephones. Shut up! You're in the army now, little man. And there's no discharge in this war.

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When he got to Grand Central at half past 5, it was like a dream in a fever. His train was going to be late in leaving; all the trains were late, either in leaving or arriving. Loud-speakers gave hoarse, furious announcements, as if to impertinent children who were trying to interrupt. Because of the serious food situation, it has been necessary to re-route freight and refrigeration trains in many sections. . . . The public is requested to accept minor transportation delays with patience. Food First. They were making a slogan out of that. Food First.

There were fights, genuine hand-to-hand fights about the telephone booths. Stan gave up trying to call Celia, to tell her he would be late, and he was an hour late. The train was jammed; half or more of the commuters were carrying bags of food, anything they could get; one elderly woman had twelve cans of loganberries, a man had five pounds of cucumbers, and a gunny sack of brown sugar; a fellow Stan knew was sweating under the weight of a suitcase full of gin and rye bottles. All the liquor'll be gone in a day or two, he said.

Cigarettes were difficult to get, or cigars, or pipe mixtures. The tobacco crop was hard hit. The late editions of newspapers were strangely flimsy and small. Because of the pulp shortage, we can give our readers only the essential news at this time. And, of course, the baseball scores, the race track finals. The scientists . . . Hydroponics seen as possible solution. . . . Closed-seeding successful, say Kentucky farmers. Food supply ample for present, say experts, if hoarding is stopped. Share the food. Food First.

I hope Celia's not too much worried about my being late, he thought. But probably she's heard, on the radio, or from the neighbors, that the trains are late. It's damn hard for her, all of this. The women with children have the worst of it.

When he went up the steps of the veranda, she did not come to open the door for him. He entered, and stood listening, but he did not hear her upstairs with the children. He found her in the kitchen, where it was incredibly hot; she had a white scarf tied over her forehead, like a stoker; her hair was wet, and her dark lashes; she looked pale and strange.

"I've — been baking. . . ." she said. "Making bread. Fourteen loaves. . . . I — never tried making bread before, but . . . Libby's aunt and one of her children died."

"Come out of here!" he said, sharply. "Come into the sitting room and I'll turn on the fan."

"I've got to — I've got to see . . ." she said, and opened the oven door. A blast of heat came out, and a sour smell.

"Two more loaves . . ." she said.

"I'll watch them. Come out of here!"

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"Libby's aunt died, and her little boy . . ."

"That's too bad. Only I've never seen Libby's aunt, so I can't take it too hard."

"She bought ten pounds of rye flour. But there was something wrong with it. Something . . . It makes you go crazy. It kills you."

"All right. We'll cut out the rye flour."

"I bought ten pounds myself. . . . Ten pounds . . . I had to throw it all away. Ten pounds . . . This . . . This is all the other kinds of flour I could get. Buckwheat, potato flour, rice flour . . . I — baked it quick — before it could spoil."

"Any dinner?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Some nice home-made pea soup and — I've forgotten, but something else . . . Oh, yes! Some nice — parsley . . . And some delicious mint jelly I made. . . ."

"Good!" said Stan.

I'm not a scientist, he thought. I'm not an expert, in anything. But, by God, I'm a man. I can try.

The plan came to him, then and there, before they sat down to that dinner. After they had gone to bed, he lay in the hot darkness and thought out the details. He did not feel in any way restless; he did not want to sleep.

At 4 o'clock he got up, very carefully and quietly. He dressed in the bathroom, and went down the stairs, carrying his shoes in his hand. In the hall closet which they kept locked he had a rifle and a box of ammunition. He had learned in the Army how to use a rifle; he was a pretty good shot, and when they moved out here, he had bought this rifle, with the idea of going hunting some time with some of the men he knew.

Only, I don't really want to go killing rabbits, squirrels, anything, he thought. I dare say I got an allergy in the Army toward shooting, or being shot.

He left the house by the back door. It was still dark, but he had a flashlight with him; he crossed the road, to the little ship yard, and a dog began to bark frantically. Shut up! he said to it, under his breath. You make me nervous. I don't want to have to shoot *you*. I know you, and you're a rather nice dog. Shut up!

He got into one of the rowboats tied up there; he unfastened the painter, and began to row across the inlet, and, in the hot, dark silence the noise of the oars seemed to him amazingly loud; squeak, dip, squeak, dip, a splash . . . Shut up! he said to the oars. I want this kept quiet.

He stopped in midstream, and waited. A cigarette is a risk, he thought. But I'll take a chance that nobody sees it, or smells it.

He was intensely wide-awake, not tired, not impatient. Just ready. And

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little by little the sky was growing light, a gray and secret light. There's the east, he thought, but there's no sun yet. Maybe there won't be any today. But if it rains, then what? Will they come anyhow? Or what if it's too late, and they never come again?

Ten minutes to 5. No sun; only that gray light. And no hint of that sound he was waiting for; no sounds but the queer ones that come in the dark water, a little ripple, a little splash, something that seemed to jump up, and fall back; the whisper of leaves in the woodland. Five minutes to 5.

Here they come! he said to himself. And they came with a rush, like a great wind, twittering, mewing, cawing, wide wings flailing, tiny wings humming. He set the flashlight on end, and took aim, and the shots were deafening, horrifying, as if the sky cracked open. Six shots, and he brought two of them down, tumbling into the water. He rowed after one, and picked it up, and it flapped wildly on the boards by his feet. The other bird was swimming, slowly and clumsily, and he rowed after it.

It climbed out of the water by the boat yard, and he jumped out of the boat and followed it, carrying the other wounded bird in his arm.

"Hey! *Hey!* What are you doing?" shouted the old man.

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"Let me alone!" said Stan.

The dog came rushing at him, barking.

"Call off your dog, or I'll have to shoot him," said Stan. "Let me alone."

"I'll get the police on you!" cried the old man. "Shootin' off a gun and —"

"Shut up!" said Stan, casually.

The bird that had been swimming was flapping across the road now; as he came near it, it took off, with an effort, flying low. It crossed his own garden, and he followed it; across a neighbor's garden, across another road, a field, and into a little wood. There he lost track of it, could not see it or hear it. He put the other wounded bird on the ground, and it struggled forward a little, and collapsed. He stirred it with a stick, and it moved again, and again lay flat. He gave it a merciful end with a bullet, and the sound of the shot made something stir in the bushes. It was the first bird, and once more it rose into the air and began to fly, slowly and clumsily.

I'm sorry, he told it. I'm damn sorry. But I've got to try. The sun was up, a blazing sun; the bird could make only short flights now, and then collapse. He followed it, through fields and woods, along roads and lanes, up hills, down hills. There were tears on his face when he stirred the wounded creature to go on again; he was glad when at last it died. He sat down beside it, exhausted, sick with pity, and contrition; he did not know where he was, or how far he had come, and for the moment he did not care.

Then he heard them. All through this monstrous journey, whether in the fierce sun, in the shade of trees, in gardens, in meadows, he had not once heard the sound of a bird; he had not been aware of this, but only of something strange and desolate in the summer world. And now he heard them, a multitude of them.

But we can't live without them! he cried aloud. They don't need us, but we've got to have them.

He did not know where he was; on a hilltop somewhere, overlooking a river. He listened, trying to decide the direction of the sound; then he left the dead bird lying in the sun and started down the hillside, over parched grass that was slippery underfoot. His rifle felt heavy, very heavy, but he must take it, wherever he was going. He must be ready to do whatever he might have to do.

That afternoon, a man walked into a garage in a little Connecticut township.

"I want to rent a car for twenty-four hours," he said. "Drive it myself."

He was dirty, his shirt was torn, his flannel trousers were muddy and wet up to the knees, his face was badly scratched, and he walked with a heavy limp.

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"Got references?" the garage owner asked him.

"No. I don't know anyone here. But I'll give you a hundred dollar deposit."

"Got your driver's license?"

"Yes. But — I don't want to show it just now. This is — private business. A hundred and fifty deposit."

"Sorry, man, but that's not good enough," said the owner. "My cars are all worth a lot more than that."

Some hours later, after it was dark, the man came back, and this time he had a rifle with him. He found the owner alone; he tied him up, and gagged him, and drove off in a small car, leaving two $50 bills on the desk.

The owner got himself free, and called the police, gave them a description of the car, and its license number. A little before 11 that night, a car with those license plates was intercepted, and the driver arrested.

But they let him go, in a hurry. He was a doctor, a well-known and respectable one. He had been sent for by a patient, and when he left the patient's house, he had got into his car and started home.

"Certainly I didn't look at my license plates!" he shouted. "Never thought of such a thing. If you policemen were worth your salt, things like this couldn't happen. Someone must have come along while I was with my patient, and stolen my plates and tacked on his own. It's an outrage!"

He was going to sue everyone, the police Captain, the Mayor of the town, the Governor of the state; he was going to write to all the newspapers, expose everyone; he was very tired, and he was furious.

With considerable difficulty, he was persuaded to accept apologies and go home, and the police were now alerted to find the car with the doctor's license plates. This they were not able to do at once, for it was then in a most unlikely spot. It was parked outside a police station in New Haven.

"I want to see the chief of police here — and quick!" said the young man who had driven it.

"He's home. You can tell me the tale," said the sergeant at the desk.

"I want your chief," said the young man. "This is way out of your class."

He was dirty, and muddy, with a torn shirt, a scratched face; it was obviously difficult and painful for him to walk. Nuts, that's it, thought the sergeant. And wouldn't the chief take me apart, if I called him up, this hour of the night, for some loony, or hop-head, or whatever he is.

"Listen!" said the young man. "This is the biggest thing that's ever happened."

"Sure! Sure! And you're Napoleon, aren't you?"

"Listen!" said the young man, again. "Come out and see what I've got in my car."

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The sergeant went with him out into the quiet tree-lined street. He turned on the light in the car, and he saw it.

"Jeeze!" he said.

Then he went back into the station, and called his chief. The chief was with them within half an hour, and he listened to the young man's story.

"My God . . . !" he said to the sergeant. "*I* don't know. . . . I don't know whether the man's insane, or not, but I'm not taking any chances. I'm calling Washington. Get McCorkle there for me."

He went back to the young man, and found him asleep, with his head on the desk. He shook him, until he opened his heavy eyes.

"Now, the best thing," he said, "is to get you right to the hospital —"

"No!" said the young man. "I'm going home."

"Be reasonable!" said the chief. "You've hurt your leg, and you've got some bad scratches on your face. You need treatment, and a good night's rest."

And a bath, he thought. You need a bath worse than anyone I ever came across before in my life.

"No. I'm going home," said the young man.

"Now, look!" said the chief. "You come driving up here, with — with *that* in your car, and a story which — well, which hasn't yet been substantiated in any way. If you refuse to go to the hospital voluntarily, there's nothing for it but to put you under arrest. But if you'll be reasonable . . . There are a couple of men flying here from Washington to see you tomorrow —"

"All right!" said the young man, after a moment. "Maybe these men from Washington will have enough sense to see the importance of this. I'll have to call my wife, though."

"We'll attend to that," said the chief.

"Don't tell her I'm in a hospital," said the other. "Say I'm detained in New York, on business."

So Stan went off, to a nice little private room in a hospital. There was a policeman sitting just outside his door all night, but he didn't know that. He was given a bath, his injuries were dressed, and he got an injection that sent him to sleep for over ten hours.

When he waked, a doctor came to look him over, and a nice young nurse brought him a pot of hot coffee, and orange juice, and fried eggs, and bacon, and toast, and he ate and drank all of it. Then the nurse lit a cigarette for him, and in a moment the men from Washington came into his room.

There were four of them. He was never to learn their names, or their functions, but they had, all of them, an air of authority. And a certain hostility. He felt that, at once, and it gave him a cold, queer feeling.

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"This isn't an easy story to tell," he said. "In a way, I wish I — couldn't remember it."

"Take your time," said one of the older men.

"I went out early in the morning — yesterday, was it? Seems longer . . . I took my rifle, and I rowed out into the middle of the inlet, and waited for the birds to come over. Then I shot down a couple of them."

"Why?" asked another of the men.

"I thought that if I could manage just to injure one of them, I might be able to follow it. But I . . . They both died. I kept them going, as long as I could. . . . Drove them. Forced them on, until they both died. They were — I don't know what kind of birds, but they were pretty. One was gray. One had blue wings, and a white breast. I drove them on. . . ."

"Yes," said the second man.

"But the last one brought me to where I could hear the whole flock. And I found them. Down on the bank of the river. A very lonely place. There was a sort of pit dug there, in the mud. The birds were just leaving, after their morning feed, but there was still quite a lot of . . . It's pretty nearly impossible to — describe it. Insects, worms, a mass of crawling, creeping things moving at the bottom of the pit. Phosphorescent. Green, blue, yellow. . . . And a stench like nothing you can imagine. I — feel as if I could never wash it off. . . ."

"Yes," said the second man.

"I was sitting down for a moment. Tired. I suppose I was pretty well hidden by the rocks, because the three men didn't see me. If they can be called men. They came down with parachutes. So small . . . But you saw the one in my car."

"Go on," said a third man. "You wish to assert that you saw three men descend by parachute? Descend from what? Did you see or hear a plane overhead at any time?"

"No."

"A balloon?"

"No. Nothing. They came down — very slowly. Their shoes — the things they had on their feet — were tremendously heavy. . . . They were not more than — say — three feet high, and wrinkled. Like raisins. They came down. . . . They had big containers full of these stinking insects — grubs — whatever they were, and they started emptying them into the pit. I got up then, and . . . This is the hardest part to tell. . . . Two of them were silent, all the time, but one of them . . . I can't tell you, because I'm damned if I know whether he talked to me in our language, or whether . . . I don't know if it's possible, is it? I mean, to get what's in someone else's mind without — any common language."

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"What do you think this man was saying, or trying to convey to you?" asked the fourth man.

"He said —" Stan paused. "All right," he went on. "I'm going to put it that way. I'm going to tell you he said all this. Because whether or not he spoke, I — got it. He said that the place they came from —"

"Where was this place?"

"I don't know. Either he couldn't tell me, or he didn't want me to know. Anyhow, he said that their population had increased, and the place where they lived was too small and too poor to support them comfortably. They want to live here, on Earth. But they don't want us around. But they want everything else unchanged, the animals, the birds, the fish. The oceans, the mountains, the rivers. The trees, the flowers . . . He made it sound like Paradise. And he thought it could be like that. Without us."

"What was so objectionable in us?"

"He must have been here often, or heard a lot, or studied a lot. He said we ruined everything we touched. He said we've wiped out whole species of beautiful and valuable animals and birds. He said we use an incredible amount of our time, and energy, and ingenuity to finding new ways for destroying one another. He said we were too dangerous to keep around. So they've decided to get rid of us, and then take over."

"By warfare?"

"No. They don't go in for that. He said it seemed plain idiocy to them, to risk their healthiest young men in a war. No. They think we can be destroyed by getting the birds off the job. He said they had eleven pits like this one all over the country, and that what they put into them would lure all the birds away from any other food. He said it should be obvious why they started on this country, and after they had proved the method here, and they were proving it, they could go on to the rest of the planet. I asked him where the other pits were, and . . . He didn't want to answer that one, but he did. I mean, it was all there, like a map —"

"All where?"

"Well, in his mind, I suppose," said Stan, with a growing reluctance. "I know how that must sound, but that's the way it was. He looked at me, stared at me. And somehow he knew he'd told me — let me know. And I could see — oh, hell! I can't help how it sounds. I'm giving it to you the way it was. I could see that he felt I knew entirely too much, and that this was one time when some killing had to be done. He didn't have any sort of weapon, and he was only half my size. But he was quick, and he was surprisingly strong. He jumped at me, and he brought both those metal boots, or whatever they were, down on one of my feet. Broke a couple of small bones, the doctor says. I knew what he meant to do."

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"Yes? What did you think he meant to do, Mr. Dickson?"

"I didn't think! I knew. He wanted to throw me into that — that foul, stinking pit. He got hold of me around the knees, but I pulled away. And I shot him."

"And the other two who were with him?"

"They . . . I don't know how they did it. I can just tell you what happened. They did something with their parachutes, and — they went up into the air again."

"And you allowed them to escape?"

"Yes," Stan said. "They — looked like birds. And — I didn't feel like doing any more shooting that day."

"Are you prepared to give us directions for reaching this pit, Mr. Dickson?"

"Well, I can tell you where it was. But I don't think you'll find anything much left of it. After the other two were gone, I — went — a bit berserk. I dug at the bank of the river with sticks, branches, my rifle, stones, anything, until I'd made holes to let the river run in and flood it. It — you see — the smell of it was — a bit too much."

"Then this pit which you claim to have discovered is not in existence, Mr. Dickson?"

"I don't think so. I hope it's completely flooded out."

"Then you have no evidence to offer, in corroboration of your story, Mr. Dickson?"

"No. What about the dead man in my car?"

"There's nothing in your car, Mr. Dickson."

"Look here!" cried Stan, sitting up straight in his bed. "Both the Chief and his sergeant saw that body."

"No detailed examination was made, Mr. Dickson. They are not prepared to testify that what they saw in your car was a body of any sort. It might have been a puppet, a toy of some sort."

"Where is it now?"

"There is no report of anything having been found in your car, Mr. Dickson," said the elderly man. "Moreover, we've received information that you had stolen the car you were driving."

"Look here! I left a hundred dollars deposit for that car."

"There is no record of that, Mr. Dickson. Furthermore, you were using license plates stolen from another car."

"Yes, I did that. I didn't want to be stopped by the police. I was in a hurry, to tell my story, and to show that body. To give someone in authority the location of the other pits. It seemed to me about as urgent as anything could be."

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"Are you prepared to give us the locations of these alleged pits, Mr. Dickson?"

"Not offhand. But I wrote down all I could remember, while it was fresh in my mind. I made a plan, a sort of little map, on the back of an envelope."

"Where is this envelope, Mr. Dickson?"

"In my wallet."

"As a matter of routine procedure, Mr. Dickson, the contents of your wallet, and all your pockets were examined and listed. There is no record of such an envelope, with a map or plan drawn on it."

"Look here!"

The fourth man spoke now, for the first time, a stout, sandy-haired man with pale-gray eyes.

"Mr. Dickson," he said, "we're willing to accept this episode as a temporary aberration, caused probably by drinking."

"Provided," said the elderly man, "that we are assured it is 'temporary.' If any symptoms of a permanent obsession develop, we shall be obliged, of course, to take steps."

"What 'steps'?" Stan demanded. But he knew, by this time, what they meant.

"We can't have the public morale undermined by wild rumors," said the sandy-haired man. "The situation is bad enough, as it is. But it can be handled by the Government, and the scientists and experts employed by the Government, and it will be. Unauthenticated rumors might cause a panic to develop. And we can't allow such rumors to circulate."

"Meaning —?" said Stan. "That if I tell my story, to anyone, any time, I'll be locked up in some mental institution?"

"If a permanent obsession develops —" said the elderly man.

There was a silence.

"Any objection to my going home now?" Stan asked.

"None whatever, Mr. Dickson," said the first man. "And you can rest assured that, unless you persist in some course detrimental to public morale, no charges will be brought against you."

"Damn white of you," said Stan.

He took a train home, and a taxi from the station.

I've got to have a story for Celia, he thought. But not the truth. I'll have to lie to her, and that won't be easy. It ought to be a good lie, only I don't seem very bright, just now. Could be I'm tired. . . . She'll probably know I'm lying, and that'll hurt her. But I can't tell her the truth. She couldn't believe it. Nobody ever will. I don't want to tell anybody. I don't want to think about it, or remember it. I don't want to talk at all.

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But I'll have to talk. Stan, where have you *been?* Who, me? Oh, nowhere special. I was just having a temporary aberration. Much better now, thanks.

The little house looked almost unbelievably pretty, this hot afternoon; the trees stirred in the light breeze; it was so good to get back.

Before he reached the top of the steps, Celia opened the door.

"Hello, Stan!" she said.

His heart sank, at the sight of her, so slender and straight and lovely, in her blue linen dress, smiling at him. But her nonchalance was not convincing, and she was pale; there was a look of strain about her dark eyes.

"Cecily . . ." he said. "I'm sorry."

And if only we could let it go at that, he thought. If I could sit down beside her, with my arm around her, or even just sit in the same room with her, and not talk, not answer questions, not make up lies . . .

"Stan, listen!" she cried.

He raised his head, frowning a little.

"I don't hear anything," he said.

"It's the birds, Stan! They're back again! They didn't go away this morning!"

"Good!" he said with an effort. "Fine!"

"Stan, come on in! You're just in time for the 4 o'clock news on the radio."

"Well, no, thanks, Cecily. I don't —"

"Come on!" she said, and held out her hand, and he took it and went into the house with her. A big tree outside shaded the windows here, giving a cool, greenish light to the living room that was neat almost to primness. That's how Celia wants things, he thought. Order, and decency, and peace . . . Only not that portentous voice on the radio.

"Turn it off, Perfect!" he said.

"But I want you to hear it, Stan," she said. "I heard the news at 3, and maybe they'll have more about it now."

"These pits filled with insects have been formed, scientists say, by unusual climatic conditions. Yesterday one of these pits was discovered in Connecticut, and two more have been found and destroyed this afternoon, one in Idaho, one in Virginia. These discoveries were made possible by a method devised by Dr. Wilbur Jonas, world-famous ornithologist employed by the Government in the preservation of wild life. Dr. Jonas has demonstrated that a bird's wing may be clipped in such a manner as to render its flight slow enough to be followed easily. This has led the experts —"

"Turn it off, Celia!"

"When I got up yesterday, Stan," she said, "you'd gone. And you'd taken your rifle, and all our cash. I wasn't very happy, Stan."

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"Celia, I'm sorry. But — I couldn't leave a note for you. I didn't know — just where I was going, or when I'd get back."

"Birds in the vicinity of the three destroyed pits have already returned to their normal and invaluable function of controlling insect pests," said the portentous voice, "and scientists now predict that within a few days' time the food crisis will be ended —"

"The old man from the boat yard came over yesterday morning," she said. "He told me you'd been shooting birds from one of his rowboats. He said you were crazy, threatening to shoot his dog, and so on. But I thought I was beginning to understand. Only, I was worried. . . . When the night came, and I hadn't heard . . . I was frightened."

"Celia . . . I'm sorry."

"Then this morning the head of the police here came to see me. Early, before we'd finished breakfast. He asked me where you were, and I said I didn't know, and didn't care."

"Celia!"

"He was surprised, too. He asked if that meant that you and I didn't get on together. And I said it meant just the opposite. I said we didn't need to ask each other questions, ever. I said that wherever you'd gone, it was all right with me. Then he told me he'd heard from the police in New Haven, and that you were being 'detained' there. He said you'd told them some story about having saved the earth from an invasion from another planet. I told him you didn't know how to talk that way, and he left. But he came back, in less than an hour. He said there was nothing at all in the story he'd heard, and please not to mention it to anyone, and that you weren't being 'detained,' but would be home very soon."

"And so —" boomed the portentous voice, "due to the knowledge and skill and unremitting vigilance of our Government scientists and experts, the pits are being discovered and rendered harmless, our birds are returning, and disaster has been averted. Let us all be grateful to these modest and unassuming men, whose selfless labors have —"

She turned off the radio.

"You had something to do with this, Stan," she said. "I was sure of that, as soon as the old man from the boat yard came over here. Because, you see, I know you're not crazy. And I know you're not the sportsman type who goes out to shoot birds before sunrise."

He said nothing.

"If you don't want to tell me, Stan," she said, "it's all right."

"It isn't a question of not wanting to," he said. I don't think I *can*."

"I guess there isn't anything you can't tell me, Stan. Want to try?"

"I don't know. . . ." he said.

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He lit a cigarette, and sat down on the arm of a chair, and she sat in a corner of the sofa, and he told her. He was slow about it, at first, cautious, groping, but after the beginning it was not hard. She had asked him a few questions, but when he had finished, she was silent.

"Celia . . . ?" he said.

"You did it," she said. "You're exhausted, and half-sick, and you've hurt your foot. You'll never get any credit for it, or any thanks. Only — *I'll* always know, Stan."

"That's good enough," he said, quietly. "Celia, are you crying?"

"It's the — birds," she said. "Maybe all the rest of my life, I'll feel like crying — when I hear the birds getting ready for bed — or early in the morning —"

"Don't cry, Celia! Please!"

"In a moment," she said, "Libby'll bring the children home — and I'll watch her feeding them — and I'll cook dinner — for you and me — and I'll be very gay and silly — so that you won't suspect — what I'm thinking. Their father, and my husband. Our man."

He crossed the room and sat down beside her; he took her hand and laid it against his cheek. "That's what I want to be," he said.

Coming Next Month

Our next issue (on the stands in early July) will feature short novelets by two of our favorite writers:

Gilead, in which Zenna Henderson resumes the narrative of The People, star-stranded upon Earth, which she began so warmly in the by now classic *Ararat;* and *The Quadriopticon*, a wonderful blend of wild adventure (interplanetary) and uproarious satire (Hollywoodian) by that always surprising writer, Charles Beaumont.

We've an outstanding lot of short stories too, including *Fondly Fahrenheit*, a characteristically startling Alfred Bester study in the crime of the future; and *The Little Black Train*, the latest (and to our tastes one of the best) of Manly Wade Wellman's tales of the ballad-singer John.

There'll also be a factual article by Miriam Allen deFord, on Dr. Alfonso Herrera and his extraordinary attempts at the creation of artificial life, based, like her essay on Charles Fort, on hitherto unpublished correspondence.

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Some Facts About Robots

I

Robots are a metal race
And wear, where we all wear a face,
A shined and steely carapace.

A robot has no built-in fears
But can be brought to greasy tears
By the stripping of his gears.

II

A robot does not drink or smoke,
A robot does not crack a joke.

A robot's work is never done.
A robot has no time for fun.

A robot is not made for laughter —
He's too busy looking after.

III

A robot, when he stops to think
May not make a sound
Or else, depending on his model,
While his wheels go round
He may rattle, he may clink
But only rarely yodel!

LEONARD WOLF

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The tale of Doom has been one of the staples of science fiction since its earliest days. You have just read a distinguished modern example by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding; now we bring you an extraordinary primitive specimen — a 60-year-old story foretelling the end-of-civilization-as-we-know-it through a Doom which we moderns have come to recognize only in the past few years.

Robert Barr (1850-1912) was a one-man English Speaking Union, born in Scotland, educated in Canada, journalistically trained in the United States, and finally successful in England, where he edited and contributed to many humorous magazines. Highly popular though his light fiction was in its day, he's chiefly remembered now by connoisseurs of the detective short story; his THE TRIUMPHS OF EUGÈNE VALMONT *contains the classic story,* The Absent-Minded Coterie, *and his* The Great Pegram Mystery *ranks as one of the few truly first rate parodies of Sherlock Holmes. But Barr also indulged in occasional fantasy and science fiction which deserves to be better remembered — especially for this striking prophecy, in 1894, of today's menacing problem of smog. For further comment on the accuracy of Barr's forecast, see the end of the story.*

The Doom of London

by ROBERT BARR

I. — The Self-conceit of the 20th Century.

I TRUST I AM thankful my life has been spared until I have seen that most brilliant epoch of the world's history — the middle of the Twentieth Century. It would be useless for any man to disparage the vast achievements of the past 50 years, and if I venture to call attention to the fact, now apparently forgotten, that the people of the Nineteenth Century succeeded in accomplishing many notable things, it must not be imagined that I intend thereby to discount in any measure the marvellous inventions of the present age.

Men have always been somewhat prone to look with a certain condescension upon those who lived 50 or 100 years before them. This seems to me the

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especial weakness of the present age: a feeling of national self-conceit, which, when it exists, should at least be kept as much in the background as possible. It will astonish many to know that such also was a failing of the people of the Nineteenth Century.

They imagined themselves living in an age of progress, and while I am not foolish enough to attempt to prove that they did anything really worth recording, yet it must be admitted by any unprejudiced man of research that their inventions were at least stepping-stones to those of today. Although the telephone and telegraph, and all other electrical appliances, are now to be found only in our national museums, or in the private collections of those few men who take any interest in the doings of the last century, nevertheless, the study of the now obsolete science of electricity led up to the recent discovery of vibratory ether which does the work of the world so satisfactorily. The people of the Nineteenth Century were not fools, and although I am well aware that this statement will be received with scorn where it attracts any attention whatever, yet who can say that the progress of the next half-century may not be as great as that of the one now ended, and that the people of the next century may not look upon us with the same contempt which we feel toward those who lived 50 years ago?

Being an old man, I am, perhaps, a laggard who dwells in the past rather than the present; still, it seems to me that such an article as that which appeared recently in *Blackwoods'* from the talented pen of Prof. Mowberry, of Oxford University, is utterly unjustifiable. Under the title of "Did the People of London Deserve their Fate?" he endeavors to show that the simultaneous blotting out of millions of human beings was a beneficial event, the good results of which we still enjoy. According to him, Londoners were so dull-witted and stupid, so incapable of improvement, so sodden in the vice of mere money-gathering, that nothing but their total extinction would have sufficed, and that, instead of being an appalling catastrophe, the doom of London was an unmixed blessing. In spite of the unanimous approval with which this article has been received by the press, I still maintain that such writing is uncalled for, and that there is something to be said for the London of the Nineteenth Century.

II. — Why London, Warned, Was Unprepared.

The indignation I felt in first reading the article alluded to still remains with me, and it has caused me to write these words, giving some account of what I must still regard, in spite of the sneers of the present age, as the most terrible disaster that ever overtook a portion of the human race.

I shall not endeavor to place before those who read, any record of the

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achievements pertaining to the time in question. But I would like to say a few words about the alleged stupidity of the people of London in making no preparations for a disaster regarding which they had continual and ever-recurring warning. They have been compared with the inhabitants of Pompeii making merry at the foot of a volcano.

In the first place, fogs were so common in London, especially in winter, that no particular attention was paid to them. They were merely looked upon as inconvenient annoyances, interrupting traffic and prejudicial to health, but I doubt if anyone thought it possible for a fog to become one vast smothering mattress pressed down upon a whole metropolis, extinguishing life as if the city suffered from hopeless hydrophobia. I have read that victims bitten by mad dogs were formerly put out of their sufferings in that way, although I doubt much if such things were ever actually done, notwithstanding the charges of savage barbarity now made against the people of the Nineteenth Century.

Probably, the inhabitants of Pompeii were so accustomed to the eruptions of Vesuvius that they gave no thought to the possibility of their city being destroyed by a storm of ashes and an overflow of lava. Rain frequently descended upon London, and if a rainfall continued long enough it would certainly have flooded the metropolis, but no precautions were taken against a flood from the clouds. Why, then, should the people have been expected to prepare for a catastrophe from fog, such as there had never been any experience of in the world's history? The people of London were far from being the sluggish dolts present-day writers would have us believe.

III. — The Coincidence that Came at Last.

As fog has now been abolished both on sea and land, and as few of the present generation have even seen one, it may not be out of place to give a few lines on the subject of fogs in general, and the London fogs in particular, which through local peculiarities differed from all others. A fog was simply watery vapor rising from the marshy surface of the land or from the sea, or condensed into a cloud from the saturated atmosphere. In my day, fogs were a great danger at sea, for people then travelled by means of steamships that sailed upon the surface of the ocean.

London at the end of the Nineteenth Century consumed vast quantities of a soft bituminous coal for the purpose of heating rooms and of preparing food. In the morning and during the day, clouds of black smoke were poured forth from thousands of chimneys. When a mass of white vapor arose in the night these clouds of smoke fell upon the fog, pressing it down, filtering slowly through it, and adding to its density. The sun would have absorbed

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the fog but for the layer of smoke that lay thick above the vapor and prevented the rays reaching it. Once this condition of things prevailed, nothing could clear London but a breeze of wind from any direction. London frequently had a seven days' fog, and sometimes a seven days' calm, but these two conditions never coincided until the last year of the last century. The coincidence, as everyone knows, meant death — death so wholesale that no war the earth has ever seen left such slaughter behind it. To understand the situation, one has only to imagine the fog as taking the place of the ashes at Pompeii, and the coal-smoke as being the lava that covered it. The result to the inhabitants in both cases was exactly the same.

IV. — The American Who Wanted to Sell.

I was at the time confidential clerk to the house of Fulton, Brixton & Co., a firm in Cannon Street, dealing largely in chemicals and chemical apparatus. Fulton I never knew; he died long before my time. Sir John Brixton was my chief, knighted, I believe, for services to his party, or because he was an official in the City during some royal progress through it; I have forgotten which.

My small room was next to his large one, and my chief duty was to see that no one had an interview with Sir John unless he was an important man or had important business. Sir John was a difficult man to see, and a difficult man to deal with when he was seen. He had little respect for most men's feelings, and none at all for mine. If I allowed a man to enter his room who should have been dealt with by one of the minor members of the company, Sir John made no effort to conceal his opinion of me.

One day, in the autumn of the last year of the century, an American was shown into my room. Nothing would do but he must have an interview with Sir John Brixton. I told him that it was impossible, as Sir John was extremely busy, but that if he explained his business to me I would lay it before Sir John at the first favorable opportunity.

The American demurred at this, but finally accepted the inevitable. He was the inventor, he said, of a machine that would revolutionize life in London, and he wanted Fulton, Brixton & Co. to become agents for it. The machine, which he had in a small handbag with him, was of white metal, and it was so constructed that by turning an index it gave out greater or less volumes of oxygen gas. The gas, I understood, was stored in the interior in liquid form under great pressure, and would last, if I remember rightly, for six months without recharging. There was also a rubber tube with a mouthpiece attached to it, and the American said that if a man took a few whiffs a day he would experience beneficial results.

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Now, I knew there was not the slightest use in showing the machine to Sir John, because we dealt in old-established British apparatus, and never in any of the new-fangled Yankee inventions. Besides, Sir John had a prejudice against Americans, and I felt sure this man would exasperate him, as he was a most cadaverous specimen of the race, with high nasal tones, and a most deplorable pronunciation, much given to phrases savoring of slang; and he exhibited also a certain nervous familiarity of demeanor towards people to whom he was all but a complete stranger. It was impossible for me to allow such a man to enter the presence of Sir John Brixton, and when he returned some days later I explained to him, I hope with courtesy, that the head of the house regretted very much his inability to consider his proposal regarding the machine. The ardor of the American seemed in no way dampened by this rebuff. He said I could not have explained the possibilities of the apparatus properly to Sir John; he characterized it as a great invention, and said it meant a fortune to whoever obtained the agency for it. He hinted that other noted London houses were anxious to secure it, but for some reason not stated he preferred to deal with us. He left some printed pamphlets referring to the invention, and said he would call again.

V. — The American Sees Sir John.

Many a time I have since thought of that persistent American, and wondered whether he left London before the disaster, or was one of the unidentified thousands who were buried in unmarked graves. Little did Sir John think when he expelled him with some asperity from his presence, that he was turning away an offer of life, and that the heated words he used were, in reality, a sentence of death upon himself. For my own part, I regret that I lost my temper, and told the American his business methods did not commend themselves to me. Perhaps he did not feel the sting of this; indeed, I feel certain he did not, for, unknowingly, he saved my life. Be that as it may, he showed no resentment, but immediately asked me out to drink with him, an offer I was compelled to refuse.

But I am getting ahead of my story. Indeed, being unaccustomed to writing, it is difficult for me to set down events in their proper sequence.

The American called upon me several times after I told him our house could not deal with him. He got into the habit of dropping in upon me unannounced, which I did not at all like, but I gave no instructions regarding his intrusions, because I had no idea of the extremes to which he was evidently prepared to go.

One day, as he sat near my desk reading a paper, I was temporarily called from the room. When I returned I thought he had gone, taking

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his machine with him, but a moment later I was shocked to hear his high nasal tones in Sir John's room alternating with the deep notes of my chief's voice, which apparently exercised no such dread upon the American as upon those who were more accustomed to them.

I at once entered the room, and was about to explain to Sir John that the American was there through no connivance of mine, when my chief asked me to be silent, and, turning to his visitor, gruffly requested him to proceed with his interesting narration. The inventor needed no second invitation, but went on with his glib talk, while Sir John's frown grew deeper, and his face became redder under his fringe of white hair. When the American had finished, Sir John roughly bade him begone, and take his accursed machine with him. He said it was an insult for a person with one foot in the grave to bring a so-called health invention to a robust man who never had a day's illness. I do not know why he listened so long to the American, when he had made up his mind from the first not to deal with him, unless it was to punish me for inadvertently allowing the stranger to enter.

The interview distressed me exceedingly, as I stood there helpless, knowing Sir John was becoming more and more angry with every word the foreigner uttered, but, at last, I succeeded in drawing the inventor and his work into my own room and closing the door. I sincerely hoped I would never see the American again, and my wish was gratified. He insisted on setting his machine going, and placing it on a shelf in my room. He asked me to slip it into Sir John's room some foggy day and note the effect. The man said he would call again, but he never did.

VI. — How the Smoke Held Down the Fog.

It was on a Friday that the fog came down upon us.

The weather was very fine up to the middle of November that autumn. The fog did not seem to have anything unusual about it. I have seen many worse fogs than that appeared to be. As day followed day, however, the atmosphere became denser and darker, caused, I suppose, by the increasing volume of coal-smoke poured out upon it. The peculiarity about those seven days was the intense stillness of the air. We were, although we did not know it, under an air-proof canopy, and were slowly but surely exhausting the life-giving oxygen around us, and replacing it by poisonous carbonic acid gas.

Scientific men have since showed that a simple mathematical calculation might have told us exactly when the last atom of oxygen would have been consumed; but it is easy to be wise after the event. The body of the greatest

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mathematician in England was found in the Strand. He came that morning from Cambridge.

During the fog there was always a marked increase in the death rate, and on this occasion the increase was no greater than usual until the sixth day. The newspapers on the morning of the seventh were full of startling statistics, but at the time of going to press the full significance of the alarming figures was not realized. The editorials of the morning papers on the seventh day contained no warning of the calamity that was so speedily to follow their appearance.

I lived then at Ealing, a Western suburb of London, and came every morning to Cannon Street by a certain train. I had up to the sixth day experienced no inconvenience from the fog, and this was largely due, I am convinced, to the unnoticed operations of the American machine.

On the fifth and sixth days Sir John did not come to the City, but he was in his office on the seventh. The door between his room and mine was closed. Shortly after 10 o'clock I heard a cry in his room, followed by a heavy fall. I opened the door, and saw Sir John lying face downwards on the floor. Hastening towards him, I felt for the first time the deadly effect of the deoxygenized atmosphere, and before I reached him I fell first on one knee and then headlong. I realized that my senses were leaving me, and instinctively crawled back to my own room, where the oppression was at once lifted, and I stood again upon my feet, gasping.

I closed the door of Sir John's room, thinking it filled with poisonous fumes, as, indeed, it was. I called loudly for help, but there was no answer. On opening the door to the main office I met again what I thought was the noxious vapor. Speedily as I closed the door, I was impressed by the intense silence of the usually busy office, and saw that some of the clerks were motionless on the floor, and others sat with their heads on their desks as if asleep. Even at this awful moment I did not realize that what I saw was common to all London, and not, as I imagined, a local disaster, caused by the breaking of some carboys in our cellar. (It was filled with chemicals of every kind, of whose properties I was ignorant, dealing as I did with the accountant, and not the scientific side of our business.)

I opened the only window in my room, and again shouted for help. The street was silent and dark in the ominously still fog, and what now froze me with horror was meeting the same deadly, stifling atmosphere that was in the rooms. In falling I brought down the window, and shut out the poisonous air. Again I revived, and slowly the true state of things began to dawn upon me. I was in an oasis of oxygen.

I at once surmised that the machine on my shelf was reponsible for the existence of this oasis in a vast desert of deadly gas. I took down the

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American's machine, fearful in moving it that I might stop its working. Taking the mouthpiece between my lips I again entered Sir John's room, this time without feeling any ill effects. My poor master was long beyond human help. There was evidently no one alive in the building except myself. Out in the street all was silent and dark. The gas was extinguished, but here and there in shops the incandescent lights were still weirdly burning, depending, as they did, on accumulators, and not on direct engine power.

I turned automatically towards Cannon Street Station, knowing my way to it even if blindfolded, stumbling over bodies prone on the pavement, and in crossing the street I ran against a motionless 'bus, spectral in the fog, with dead horses lying in front, and their reins dangling from the nerveless hand of a dead driver. The ghostlike passengers, equally silent, sat bolt upright, or hung over the edge-boards in attitudes horribly grotesque.

VII. — The Train with its Trail of the Dead.

If a man's reasoning faculties were alert at such a time (I confess mine were dormant), he would have known there could be no trains at Cannon Street Station, for if there was not enough oxygen in the air to keep a man alive, or a gas-jet alight, there would certainly not be enough to enable an engine fire to burn, even if the engineer retained sufficient energy to attend to his task. At times instinct is better than reason, and it proved so in this case.

The railway from Ealing in those days came under the City in a deep tunnel. It would appear that in this underground passage the carbonic acid gas would first find a resting-place on account of its weight; but such was not the fact. I imagine that a current through the tunnel brought from the outlying districts a supply of comparatively pure air that, for some minutes after the general disaster, maintained human life.

Be this as it may, the long platforms of Cannon Street Underground Station presented a fearful spectacle. A train stood at the down platform. The electric lights burned fitfully. This platform was crowded with men, who fought each other like demons, apparently for no reason, because the train was already packed as full as it could hold. Hundreds were dead under foot, and every now and then a blast of foul air came along the tunnel, whereupon hundreds more would relax their grips, and succumb. Over their bodies the survivors fought, with continually thinning ranks. It seemed to me that most of those in the standing train were dead. Sometimes a desperate body of fighters climbed over those lying in heaps and,

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throwing open a carriage door, hauled out passengers already in, and took their places, gasping. Those in the train offered no resistance, and lay motionless where they were flung, or rolled helplessly under the wheels of the train. I made my way along the wall as well as I could to the engine, wondering why the train did not go. The engineer lay on the floor of his cab, and the fires were out.

Custom is a curious thing. The struggling mob, fighting wildly for places in the carriages, were so accustomed to trains arriving and departing that it apparently occurred to none of them that the engineer was human and subject to the same atmospheric conditions as themselves. I placed the mouthpiece between his purple lips, and, holding my own breath like a submerged man, succeeded in reviving him. He said that if I gave him the machine he would take out the train as far as the steam already in the boiler would carry it. I refused to do this, but stepped on the engine with him, saying it would keep life in both of us until we got out into better air. In a surly manner he agreed to this and started the train, but he did not play fair.

Each time he refused to give up the machine until I was in a fainting condition with holding in my breath, and, finally, he felled me to the floor of the cab. I imagine that the machine rolled off the train as I fell and that he jumped after it. The remarkable thing is that neither of us needed the machine, for I remember that just after we started I noticed through the open iron door that the engine fire suddenly became aglow again, although at the time I was in too great a state of bewilderment and horror to understand what it meant. A western gale had sprung up — an hour too late.

Even before we left Cannon Street those who still survived were comparatively safe, for 167 persons were rescued from that fearful heap of dead on the platforms, although many died within a day or two after, and others never recovered their reason.

When I regained my senses after the blow dealt by the engineer, I found myself alone, and the train speeding across the Thames near Kew. I tried to stop the engine, but did not succeed. However, in experimenting, I managed to turn on the air brake, which in some degree checked the train, and lessened the impact when the crash came at Richmond terminus. I sprang off on the platform before the engine reached the terminal buffers, and saw passing me like a nightmare the ghastly trainload of the dead. Most of the doors were swinging open, and every compartment was jammed full, although, as I afterwards learned, at each curve of the permanent way, or extra lurch of the train, bodies had fallen out all along the line. The smash at Richmond made no difference to the passengers. Besides

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myself, only two persons were taken alive from the train, and one of these, his clothes torn from his back in the struggle, was sent to an asylum, where he was never able to tell who he was; neither, as far as I know, did anyone ever claim him.

In 1894, Robert Barr justly compared the Londoners of his own time to the merry and doomed inhabitants of Pompeii, for their disregard of the dangers inherent in the combination of smoke and fog. Now, in what Mr. Barr calls "the self-conceit of the Twentieth Century," are we any wiser? In early March of 1954, after 60 years of striding progress, the representatives of seven counties in the San Francisco Bay Area met to discuss setting up a smog control district. They decided against it because of "the lack of available, pertinent research on air pollution"! According to an explanatory editorial in the Oakland Tribune, *"Despite fragmentary research, mainly in the Los Angeles area, nobody has the facts on smog. The problem has not been thoroughly and completely examined by competent authorities." And so we go cheerily on, in our Pompeii in which Vesuvius is nothing but a topic for television gags. . . .*

Recommended Reading

Books are relatively scarce this month, and stories are plentiful; so we're omitting our regular "Recommended Reading" section. We'll be back next month with full coverage of the late Spring publications in science-fantasy; but we can't wait a month to urge you to buy Robert Sheckley's UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS (Ballantine, $2.50 cloth, 35¢ paper), a collection of thirteen stories, all new to book form and all invested with the same offbeat Sheckleyan enchantment which you'll find in this issue starting on page 35.

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Few science-fantasy writers have sprung so rapidly into the front rank as Robert Sheckley. It seems to us only yesterday that Sheckley was a promising but unpublished writer whom we were hopefully encouraging; and in fact it is only somewhat over two years ago that he made his first sale. Since then he has appeared regularly in almost every magazine of imaginative fiction, in many anthologies, and in a number of major slicks; and most recently he has received the accolade of the publication of a collection of his short stories (UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS) *by Ballantine. The reasons for this sudden rise you can find exemplified in this story — simple, human, humorous, fantastically logical and completely surprising.*

The Accountant

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

MR. DEE was seated in the big armchair, his belt loosened, the evening papers strewn around his knees. Peacefully he smoked his pipe, and considered how wonderful the world was. Today he had sold two amulets and a philter; his wife was bustling around the kitchen, preparing a delicious meal; and his pipe was drawing well. With a sigh of contentment, Mr. Dee yawned and stretched.

Morton, his nine-year-old son, hurried across the living room, laden down with books.

"How'd school go today?" Mr. Dee called.

"O.K," the boy said, slowing down, but still moving toward his room.

"What have you got there?" Mr. Dee asked, gesturing at his son's tall pile of books.

"Just some more accounting stuff," Morton said, not looking at his father. He hurried into his room.

Mr. Dee shook his head. Somewhere, the lad had picked up the notion that he wanted to be an accountant. An accountant! True, Morton was quick with figures; but he would have to forget this nonsense. Bigger things were in store for him.

The doorbell rang.

Mr. Dee tightened his belt, hastily stuffed in his shirt and opened the front door. There stood Miss Greeb, his son's fourth-grade teacher.

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"Come in, Miss Greeb," said Dee. "Can I offer you something?"

"I have no time," said Miss Greeb. She stood in the doorway, her arms akimbo. With her gray, tangled hair, her thin, long-nosed face and red runny eyes, she looked exactly like a witch. And this was as it should be, for Miss Greeb *was* a witch.

"I've come to speak to you about your son," she said.

At this moment Mrs. Dee hurried out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

"I hope he hasn't been naughty," Mrs. Dee said anxiously.

Miss Greeb sniffed ominously. "Today I gave the yearly tests. Your son failed miserably."

"Oh dear," Mrs. Dee said. "It's Spring. Perhaps —"

"Spring has nothing to do with it," said Miss Greeb. "Last week I assigned the Greater Spells of Cordus, section one. You know how easy *they* are. He didn't learn a single one."

"Hm," said Mr. Dee succinctly.

"In Biology, he doesn't have the slightest notion which are the basic conjuring herbs. Not the slightest."

"This is unthinkable," said Mr. Dee.

Miss Greeb laughed sourly. "Moreover, he has forgotten all the Secret Alphabet which he learned in third grade. He has forgotten the Protective Formula, forgotten the names of the 99 lesser imps of the Third Circle, forgotten what little he knew of the Geography of Greater Hell. And what's more, he doesn't want to learn."

Mr. and Mrs. Dee looked at each other silently. This was very serious indeed. A certain amount of boyish inattentiveness was allowable; encouraged, even, for it showed spirit. But a child *had* to learn the basics, if he ever hoped to become a full-fledged wizard.

"I can tell you right here and now," said Miss Greeb, "if this were the old days, I'd flunk him without another thought. But there are so few of us left."

Mr. Dee nodded sadly. Witchcraft had been steadily declining over the centuries. The old families died out, or were snatched by demoniac forces, or became scientists. And the fickle public showed no interest whatsoever in the charms and enchantments of ancient days.

Now, only a scattered handful possessed the Old Lore, guarding it, teaching it in places like Miss Greeb's private school for the children of wizards. It was a heritage, a sacred trust.

"It's this accounting nonsense," said Miss Greeb. "I don't know where he got the notion." She stared accusingly at Dee. "And I don't know why it wasn't nipped in the bud."

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Mr. Dee felt his cheeks grow hot.

"But I do know this. As long as Morton has *that* on his mind, he can't give his attention to Thaumaturgy."

Mr. Dee looked away from the witch's red eyes. It was his fault. He should never have brought home that toy adding machine. And when he first saw Morton playing at double entry bookkeeping, he should have burned the ledger.

But how could he know it would grow into an obsession?

Mrs. Dee smoothed out her apron, and said, "Miss Greeb, you know you have our complete confidence. What would you suggest?"

"All I can do I have done," said Miss Greeb. "The only remaining thing is to call up Boarbas, the Demon of Children. And that, naturally, is up to you."

"Oh, I don't think it's that serious yet," Mr. Dee said quickly. "Calling up Boarbas is a serious measure."

"As I said, that's up to you," Miss Greeb said. "Call Boarbas or not, as you see fit. As things stand now, your son will never be a wizard." She turned and started to leave.

"Won't you stay for a cup of tea?" Mrs. Dee asked hastily.

"No, I must attend a Witch's Coven in Cincinnati," said Miss Greeb, and vanished in a puff of orange smoke.

Mr. Dee fanned the smoke with his hands and closed the door. "Phew," he said. "You'd think she'd use a perfumed brand."

"She's old-fashioned," Mrs. Dee murmured.

They stood beside the door in silence. Mr. Dee was just beginning to feel the shock. It was hard to believe that his son, his own flesh and blood, didn't want to carry on the family tradition. It couldn't be true!

"After dinner," Dee said, finally, "I'll have a man-to-man talk with him. I'm sure we won't need any demoniac intervention."

"Good," Mrs. Dee said. "I'm sure you can make the boy understand." She smiled, and Dee caught a glimpse of the old witch-light flickering behind her eyes.

"My roast!" Mrs. Dee gasped suddenly, the witch-light dying. She hurried back to her kitchen.

Dinner was a quiet meal. Morton knew that Miss Greeb had been there, and he ate in guilty silence, glancing occasionally at his father. Mr. Dee sliced and served the roast, frowning deeply. Mrs. Dee didn't even attempt any small-talk.

After bolting his dessert, the boy hurried to his room.

"Now we'll see," Mr. Dee said to his wife. He finished the last of his

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coffee, wiped his mouth and stood up. "I am going to reason with him now. Where is my Amulet of Persuasion?"

Mrs. Dee thought deeply for a moment. Then she walked across the room to the bookcase. "Here it is," she said, lifting it from the pages of a brightly jacketed novel. "I was using it as a marker."

Mr. Dee slipped the amulet into his pocket, took a deep breath, and entered his son's room.

Morton was seated at his desk. In front of him was a notebook, scribbled with figures and tiny, precise notations. On his desk were six carefully sharpened pencils, a soap eraser, an abacus and a toy adding machine. His books hung precariously over the edge of the desk; there was *Money*, by Rimraamer, *Bank Accounting Practice*, by Johnson and Calhoun, *Ellman's Studies for the CPA*, and a dozen others.

Mr. Dee pushed aside a mound of clothes and made room for himself on the bed. "How's it going, son?" he asked, in his kindest voice.

"Fine, Dad," Morton answered eagerly. "I'm up to chapter four in *Basic Accounting*, and I answered all the questions —"

"Son," Dee broke in, speaking very softly, "how about your regular homework?"

Morton looked uncomfortable and scuffed his feet on the floor.

"You know, not many boys have a chance to become wizards in this day and age."

"Yes sir, I know." Morton looked away abruptly. In a high, nervous voice he said, "But Dad, I want to be an accountant. I really do. Dad?"

Mr. Dee shook his head. "Morton, there's always been a wizard in our family. For eighteen hundred years, the Dees have been famous in supernatural circles."

Morton continued to look out the window and scuff his feet.

"You wouldn't want to disappoint me, would you, son?" Dee smiled sadly. "You know, anyone can be an *accountant*. But only a chosen few can master the Black Arts."

Morton turned away from the window. He picked up a pencil, inspected the point, and began to turn it slowly in his fingers.

"How about it, boy? Won't you work harder for Miss Greeb?"

Morton shook his head. "I want to be an accountant."

Mr. Dee contained his sudden rush of anger with difficulty. What was wrong with the Amulet of Persuasion? Could the spell have run down? He should have recharged it. Nevertheless, he went on.

"Morton," he said in a husky voice, "I'm only a Third Degree Adept, you know. My parents were very poor. They couldn't send me to The University."

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"I know," the boy said in a whisper.

"I want you to have all the things I never had. Morton, you can be a First Degree Adept." He shook his head wistfully. "It'll be difficult. But your mother and I have a little put away, and we'll scrape the rest together somehow."

Morton was biting his lip and turning the pencil rapidly in his fingers.

"How about it, son? You know, as a First Degree Adept, you won't have to work in a store. You can be a Direct Agent of The Black One. A Direct Agent! What do you say, boy?"

For a moment, Dee thought his son was moved. Morton's lips were parted, and there was a suspicious brightness in his eyes. But then the boy glanced at his accounting books, his little abacus, his toy adding machine.

"I'm going to be an accountant," he said.

"We'll see!" Mr. Dee shouted, all patience gone. "You will *not* be an accountant, young man. You will be a wizard. It was good enough for the rest of your family, and by all that's damnable, it'll be good enough for you. You haven't heard the last of this, young man." And he stormed out of the room.

Immediately, Morton returned to his accounting books.

Mr. and Mrs. Dee sat together on the couch, not talking. Mrs. Dee was busily knotting a wind-cord, but her mind wasn't on it. Mr. Dee stared moodily at a worn spot on the living room rug.

Finally, Dee said, "I've spoiled him. Boarbas is the only solution."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Dee said hastily. "He's so young."

"Do you want your son to be an accountant?" Mr. Dee asked bitterly. "Do you want him to grow up scribbling with figures instead of doing The Black One's important work?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Dee. "But Boarbas —"

"I know. I feel like a murderer already."

They thought for a few moments. Then Mrs. Dee said, "Perhaps his grandfather can do something. He was always fond of the boy."

"Perhaps he can," Mr. Dee said thoughtfully. "But I don't know if we should disturb him. After all, the old gentleman has been dead for three years."

"I know," Mrs. Dee said, undoing an incorrect knot in the wind-cord. "But it's either that or Boarbas."

Mr. Dee agreed. Unsettling as it would be to Morton's grandfather, Boarbas was infinitely worse. Immediately, Dee made preparations for calling up his dead father.

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He gathered together the henbane, the ground unicorn's horn, the hemlock, together with a morsel of dragon's tooth. These he placed on the rug.

"Where's my wand?" he asked his wife.

"I put it in the bag with your golfsticks," she told him.

Mr. Dee got his wand and waved it over the ingredients. He muttered the three words of The Unbinding, and called out his father's name.

Immediately a wisp of smoke arose from the rug.

"Hello, Grandpa Dee," Mrs. Dee said.

"Dad, I'm sorry to disturb you," Mr. Dee said. "But my son — your grandson — refuses to become a wizard. He wants to be an — accountant."

The wisp of smoke trembled, then straightened out and described a character of the Old Language.

"Yes," Mr. Dee said. "We tried persuasion. The boy is adamant."

Again the smoke trembled, and formed another character.

"I suppose that's best," Mr. Dee said. "If you frighten him out of his wits once and for all, he'll forget this accounting nonsense. It's cruel — but it's better than Boarbas."

The wisp of smoke nodded, and streamed toward the boy's room. Mr. and Mrs. Dee sat down on the couch.

The door of Morton's room was slammed open, as though by a gigantic wind. Morton looked up, frowned, and returned to his books.

The wisp of smoke turned into a winged lion with the tail of a shark. It roared hideously, crouched, snarled, and gathered itself for a spring.

Morton glanced at it, raised both eyebrows, and proceeded to jot down a column of figures.

The lion changed into a three-headed lizard, its flanks reeking horribly of blood. Breathing gusts of fire, the lizard advanced on the boy.

Morton finished adding the column of figures, checked the result on his abacus, and looked at the lizard.

With a screech, the lizard changed into a giant gibbering bat. It fluttered around the boy's head, moaning and gibbering.

Morton grinned, and turned back to his books.

Mr. Dee was unable to stand it any longer. "Damn it," he shouted, "aren't you scared?"

"Why should I be?" Morton asked. "It's only grandpa."

Upon the word, the bat dissolved into a plume of smoke. It nodded sadly to Mr. Dee, bowed to Mrs. Dee, and vanished.

"Goodbye, Grandpa," Morton called. He got up and closed his door.

"That does it," Mr. Dee said. "The boy is too cocksure of himself. We must call up Boarbas."

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"No!" his wife said.

"What, then?"

"I just don't know any more," Mrs. Dee said, on the verge of tears. "You *know* what Boarbas does to children. They're never the same afterwards."

Mr. Dee's face was hard as granite. "I know. It can't be helped."

"He's so young!" Mrs. Dee wailed. "It — it will be traumatic!"

"If so, we will use all the resources of modern psychology to heal him," Mr. Dee said soothingly. "He will have the best psychoanalysts money can buy. But the boy must be a wizard!"

"Go ahead then," Mrs. Dee said, crying openly. "But please don't ask me to assist you."

How like a woman, Dee thought. Always turning into jelly at the moment when firmness was indicated. With a heavy heart, he made the preparations for calling up Boarbas, Demon of Children.

First came the intricate sketching of the pentagon, and the twelve-pointed star within it, and the endless spiral within that. Then came the herbs and essences; expensive items, but absolutely necessary for the conjuring. Then came the inscribing of the Protective Spell, so that Boarbas might not break loose and destroy them all. Then came the three drops of hippogriff blood —

"Where is my hippogriff blood?" Mr. Dee asked, rummaging through the living room cabinet.

"In the kitchen, in the aspirin bottle," Mrs. Dee said, wiping her eyes.

Dee found it, and then all was in readiness. He lighted the black candles and chanted the Unlocking Spell.

The room was suddenly very warm, and there remained only the Naming of the Name.

"Morton," Mr. Dee called. "Come here."

Morton opened the door and stepped out, holding one of his accounting books tightly, looking very young and defenceless.

"Morton, I am about to call up the Demon of Children. Don't make me do it, Morton."

The boy turned pale and shrank back against the door. But stubbornly he shook his head.

"Very well," Mr. Dee said. "BOARBAS!"

There was an ear-splitting clap of thunder and a wave of heat, and Boarbas appeared, as tall as the ceiling, chuckling evilly.

"Ah!" cried Boarbas, in a voice that shook the room. "A little boy."

Morton gaped, his jaw open and eyes bulging.

"A naughty little boy," Boarbas said, and laughed. The demon marched forward, shaking the house with every stride.

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"Send him away!" Mrs. Dee cried.

"I can't," Dee said, his voice breaking. "I can't do anything until he's finished."

The demon's great horned hands reached for Morton; but quickly the boy opened the accounting book. "Save me!" he screamed.

In that instant, a tall, terribly thin old man appeared, covered with worn pen points and ledger sheets, his eyes two empty zeroes.

"*Zico Pico Reel!*" chanted Boarbas, turning to grapple with the newcomer. But the thin old man laughed, and said, "A contract of a corporation which is *ultra vires* is not voidable only, but utterly void."

At these words, Boarbas was flung back, breaking a chair as he fell. He scrambled to his feet, his skin glowing red-hot with rage, and intoned the Demoniac Master-Spell: "VRAT, HAT, HO!"

But the thin old man shielded Morton with his body, and cried the words of Dissolution. "Expiration, Repeal, Occurrence, Surrender, Abandonment and Death!"

Boarbas squeaked in agony. Hastily he backed away, fumbling in the air until he found The Opening. He jumped through this, and was gone.

The tall, thin old man turned to Mr. and Mrs. Dee, cowering in a corner of the living room, and said, "Know that I am The Accountant. And Know, Moreover, that this Child has signed a Compact with Me, to enter My Apprenticeship and be My Servant. And in return for Services Rendered, I, THE ACCOUNTANT, am teaching him the Damnation of Souls, by means of ensnaring them in a cursed web of Figures, Forms, Torts and Reprisals. And behold, this is My Mark upon him!"

The Accountant held up Morton's right hand, and showed the ink smudge on the third finger.

He turned to Morton, and in a softer voice said, "Tomorrow, lad, we will consider some aspects of Income Tax-Evasion as a Path to Damnation."

"Yes *sir*," Morton said eagerly.

And with another sharp look at the Dees, The Accountant vanished.

For long seconds there was silence. Then Dee turned to his wife.

"Well," Dee said, "if the boy wants to be an accountant *that* badly, I'm sure I'm not going to stand in his way."

EPITAPH IN AVALON

Sibi, the centaur, lies under this stone.
Tried to ride side-saddle; broke every bone.

SHERWOOD SPRINGER

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We're always more than happy when we can bring you a story by a Bradbury or a Heinlein; but in some ways it's an even greater pleasure to present the first story of a hitherto unpublished author — as we did with Richard Matheson, Chad Oliver, Zenna Henderson, H. Nearing, Jr., Mildred Clingerman and many others. Here now is the latest addition to F&SF's discoveries: Albert Compton Friborg, who has been, he tells us, "at one time or another, a student at the Sorbonne, a singer with a French jazz band, a mink sexer, a student of Rabelais, a factory clerk, and a molder in a rubber plant." We hope, in time, to see stories from him on each of these subjects (with special emphasis on the application of mink sexing to xenobiology); meanwhile, this initial entry deals, in dry, witty and markedly individual style, with cybernetics, bureaucracy, milk shakes, atomic war, spittoons . . . and Love.

Careless Love

by ALBERT COMPTON FRIBORG

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK SOLOVIOFF

I

Romeo and Juliet and all their infernal descendants notwithstanding, the basic hostility (Odell reflected) *between men and women could be demonstrated pretty cleanly by one quick look at history.* "General Horace H. Bartholomew, you have the address, Dear Horace: With respect to your note of last Monday . . ."

Otherwise (Odell mused) *why is it that every time we cook up an especially destructive hunk of machinery, we feel compelled to honor it with a feminine name? Just think of all the flintlocks name of Old Betsy. To say nothing of Big Bertha. To say even less of the Black Widow.* ". . . and I'll sign that sincerely yours, I guess. Next one to J. R. Morgridge, Commissioner of Internal Security, Fifteenth Level, City, Dear John . . ."

Enoch R. Odell shifted his not inconsiderable weight from one buttock to the other, nudged with his foot the brass spittoon, relic of a lost era, kept in reserve for the visits of Commissioner J. R. Morgridge, and continued dictating; *I am morally certain* (he thought) *that the first bow and arrow was named Womba or Samba or whatever the inventor's wife went by.* ". . . your

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office has, I presume, full information on these rumors, and you know and I know that Dinah can't operate at maximum without taking these factors into account. . . ." *Wonder whether the Lizzie got her name because the christener foresaw her destructive potentialities?*

". . . and sign it Nucky and send it right down to Fifteen by tube. That'll do, Miss Carpenter." *However had the H-bomb waited until 1960 to get christened Carrie Nation?*

And now they had Dinah.

Enoch Odell — Enoch R. Odell, Director in Chief of Cybernetics (Valet de Chambre, Hairdresser, and Pander to Dinah the Magnificent) — sighed, rose heavily, and picked up his hat, a relic, like himself, of days when government offices were exposed to sun and rain and rockets. "If John Morgridge calls on that note, tell him I'll be back in ten minutes. Going out for a milk shake." *His fifth today. Got to cut down. Analyst says it's compensation for lack of affection. Damn sure thing I get no affection from Dinah.*

Dinah. She had no affection for anybody and no hate even for the men on the other side of the world whose destruction her every move was calculated to produce. In the books they had her down as Harvard Mark Fifty-four, had her named after a college that only Odell and Morgridge and a few of the other older men could remember having seen, a college that had been located in a corner of the continent where nothing had lived since the first rockets came over the pole.

And she was a big gal, Dinah was — there was a big hunk of her 40 levels down from Odell's office, a hunk that kept going on down for 90 levels more. There was a hunk of her in every place where a rocket was launched or a bomb assembled or a tank designed. And into every rocket and bomb and tank she built a piece of herself. She had an eye in every observation post in the army and an ear in every radio band, and on 90 levels of New Washington and 30 levels of New Boston and 50 levels of New Gotham she rigorously shuffled information into memory files and went to work on those files with the formulæ that had been given her by men like Odell.

A thousand times a day Dinah sent out the impulse that sent a hundred tons of radioactive death over the pole; and ten thousand times a day she impartially uncorked her formulæ and her memory files to solve the problems of strategy fed into her on behalf of generals and admirals. Without love for those whom she was trying to defend or hate for those whom she was trying to destroy.

Odell took the lift down to Five and waddled into Sammy's Milk Bar and was halfway through the third milk shake before he had definitely decided to drink two. *Compensation.* He took twenty minutes instead of ten and so Commissioner Morgridge was in his office when he got back.

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"Sit down, John. Take a load off."

"See who's talking. What's on your mind?" Morgridge looked around absent-mindedly, located the spittoon and let fly. *Oral-eroticism. Ask my analyst why the use of that foul tobacco. Non-conformism? Masochism.* Odell lit a violet-scented cigarette.

"Well, John," he wheezed, "heard some noise about civilian morale, particularly here in New Washington, especially up on Level One, especially on Pennsylvania Avenue, with particular attention to . . ."

Morgridge spat. "How much you heard?"

"So it's true." Odell lifted his eyebrows. "Surprise, surprise."

"Big joke. The Chief Executive — who, in spite of all your pretensions on behalf of that mess of filing cards and wire you call Dinah, is still the Chief Executive — shows up drunk as a hoot owl and nekkid as a jay-bird at a cabinet meeting and you think it's just good clean fun. Three cheers for the red, white and blue."

"Well, now that you put it that way," Odell looked with ill-disguised distaste at the soiled spittoon, "it must have been pretty humorous to see the old buzzard running around with no pants on."

"Bet you'll laugh yourself sick when I find myself running around with no shirt on and no job to get another one with."

"Who's bothering you this time?"

"None other than your friend and my friend, General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew. Dear old Horace has been wandering around for so long under the delusion that nice people don't get neurotic — you know, it's all a big plot on the part of the loafers and draft-dodgers — and has been preaching for so long the noise that the iron hand in the velvet glove would clear up the morale problem that the idea that a respectable Commander-in-Chief can catch the evil bug too has hit him low, but low."

"And his reaction is?" Odell prompted.

"Typical. Says he'll declare martial law if he has to."

Odell methodically demolished a hangnail. "Mmm. Even Horace can't make martial law much more martial than it already is. What else is he cooking up?"

"Who knows? Maybe he'll commission the OWI to write a new song — only nobody has the energy to sing it — or issue new uniforms to the Boy Scouts — none of whom would have the ration stamps to buy them — or start a War Bond drive — bonds to be paid for in bottle caps." Morgridge opened a fresh plug. "Or maybe he'll ask Dinah."

"Over my prostrate and quivering body he'll tie up half her circuits with a problem she has no references for."

"I'm your buddy. I won't quote you. But I'll have the file on the Presi-

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dent sent up with a survey of the latest morale material this afternoon." The Commissioner of Internal Security was a tall type and had to duck sideways to get out of Odell's office.

Odell pushed a button. "Miss Carpenter, have Jimmy come in and empty this goboon. I'm going out for a milk shake."

II

Wonder what the other side calls their machine. Olga? Sofia? Ninochka? "One more. Mocha, this time." *Or are they still naming them after the Leader over there? Basic hostility directed not toward women but toward the party in power. (No vital difference; here it's the women that're running the country.)* Odell fished for change.

Probably (he finally decided) *named the Stalin Mark Umpty-leven.* The room shook just a little and the light over the milk bar shivered almost imperceptibly. *Damn Dinah. You'd think, with the new annexes she's forever building onto herself, she'd be able to stop more of them from getting through.* He laid down a dollar and a half, rolled himself off the bar stool, and took the lift down to Dinah's main control floor.

An illuminated tri-dimensional map in one corner of the big room showed red where Dinah was digging herself new brain space. Four techs were flipping geological survey charts and phoning directions into Dinah's construction center. Odell found the O. D.

"Get away from you again?" he chuckled.

"Yeah, Chief. Building out toward that fault on the eighty-third level east. The boys are trying to divert the building binge onto eighty-four north."

"That's . . . four times this week, isn't it?"

"Five. Chief, why don't we just feed her all the geological material we have and let her take care of it herself?"

"That's been gone over before, but the board is a little bit leery of giving the old gal too many of her own reins. They got nightmares about the machines running amok and taking over." *How she can take over much more, I don't see. . . . If she quits, our main library is in her memory banks and she's got the only reflexes quick enough to stop what the boys over the pole are throwing. And where would we find the pilots to fly the planes she's flying three-quarters of the time?* "Well . . . write it up and submit it in triplicate and I'll try to push it through. And if the circuits aren't too loaded, see what kind of a résumé Dinah'll give you on what she's got on civilian morale."

Lucky Dinah. No morale problems. Umpty-leven levels down and no food problems and no sex problems and thousands of techs running around to make sure that she never feels inadequate because she's got more work than she can

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handle. And her own facilities for increasing the amount of work she can handle. I should say. Odell remembered with affection the time that he had forgotten to hang up after phoning information into Dinah and had called to his secretary to get him the President's office; and before he could turn around Dinah had shoved a tentacle twenty floors up and into the main cable and made his connection. *Good girl.*

"Chief, Dinah says all she's got is the figures on military personnel required for domestic policing and production and absentee figures for the last zillion years. And to get that I had to rephrase the question completely. No reference whatsoever, apparently, for the concept of 'morale.' "

"Thanks, Mike. Anybody calls here for me —"

"I know, Chief. You'll be at Sammy's on Five."

"Mmmm. How'd you know?"

III

Enoch Odell was fond of John Morgridge in spite of his filthy teeth and his taste for masticated nicotine. John Morgridge was a competent fellow. A good guy, even. Enoch Odell did not like General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew overmuch, in spite of the fact that General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew had a fine Hollywood smile and chewed nothing but chlorophyll. General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew, Odell had decided, was a stupid bastard. *The bastard I could take but the stupidity gets me.*

Enoch Odell was the more irritated because General H. H. had called him at Sammy's on Five in the middle of a strawberry shake. "Odell," the general was saying, "I hesitate to use the word incompetence in a case like yours," (*Chocolate, coffee, even mocha I could take, but it had to be strawberry*) "but though you may be the guiding genius behind the conception and successful operation of the Harvard Mark Fifty-four," (*A pompous bastard, too*) "there *is* a war on, and a man in your position *is* expected to be available on a moment's notice."

"What is it this time, Horace?" sighed Odell, lifting his big feet onto his desk (a position very uncomfortable for him and one which he never assumed except in the presence of General Bartholomew) and blowing violet cigarette smoke against Bartholomew's chlorophyll breath. "Tell your old Uncle Enoch all about it."

The General sputtered. "Damn it, Odell . . . I suppose you've heard about the President. I suppose you're aware of the morale problem this poses for the Administration."

"I have been aware of the morale problem for quite some time, thank you," Odell replied, "without the necessity of the White House's pointing a great red arrow at it for me. What about it?"

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"Well . . . obviously something must be done, or I'll find I need more troops at home than on the front lines. It appears that production is falling off, that alcoholism is on the increase, and that the only thing that prevents open revolt is malnutrition — and the fact that the citizenry is weaponless. And, of course, the love ingrained in all Americans for their Constitution."

"Just find this out, did you?" Odell smiled disarmingly.

The General ignored him. "I must admit that this is a problem with which I am unequipped to cope." *Surprise, surprise.* "I am a military man. I have devoted my life to the military service of my nation. I cannot comprehend this weakness on the part of the civilian population. Our boys in uniform are not subject to this malady; I have always maintained that universal military training would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a military attitude toward this problem. But since Congress has seen fit to ignore my recommendations on this point —" The General shrugged his shoulders and made a valiant attempt to twist his features into a martyred expression.

"Well, General," wheezed Odell, "I'm sure I don't know why you come to me with this problem. All my life has been devoted to the scientific advancement of my nation. Dinah is not subject to these neuroses; and I have always maintained that a sound grounding in cybernetic principles for every man would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a rational attitude toward the problem. However, since Congress has never taken much notice of my proposals on this point, and there seems little likelihood that they will in the near future, I fail to see why this is my worry at all. Now, if you will excuse me, I have an appointment on Five."

This went over the General's head too. "Well, Enoch, I may as well tell you that the High Command is considering feeding this problem into the Harvard Mark Fifty-four. They feel it's too big and too complex for us."

Odell almost panicked. "Look, Horace, Dinah hasn't got the remotest kind of references for this kind of problem. She hasn't the circuits available for the work, in the first place, and in the second place, she isn't a human, hasn't got human emotions, and therefore can't understand a human neurosis. All you could do, believe me, is tie her up for days on end while" (*This'll get you, you would-be von Klausewitz*) "while you strategists sit around waiting for her to get around to figure out your tactical problems. You might lose five thousand square miles of territory by giving her this problem now; the New Washington defenses might come down. After all, Dinah has only so many faculties available, and if you snarl her all up with this — a completely futile snarl, remember, since she can't possibly do anything about it — the rest of the war effort may well go poof."

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"You got a better idea?" Bartholomew wanted to know.

"I think so." Odell ticked off his points on his chubby fingers. "Half my life has been spent on analysts' couches. I am not subject — or not too subject — to this here war neurosis; and I would maintain that a sound grounding in psychoanalytic principles would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a well-adjusted attitude toward the problem. Call up a committee of your top analysts and your top sociologists and see if they can give you a thumb-nose analysis of the national neurosis and a possible course of action. And now, if you will excuse me, I have people to do and things to see. Good afternoon, Horace."

IV

The mills of bureaucracy grind slowly, they grind exceeding large, but grind they do manage (upon occasion) to do. The Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation was, within the space of two weeks, assembled, duly certified, cleared by House, Senate, Army, Navy, and FBI, and given priority cards (restricted) enabling them to use Dinah's memory banks for reference; they spent a week discussing (behind closed doors) the newest perception theory of the neo-Adlerian Vagankofsky (of the "other side"), but finally, after a day's meditation on the problem at hand, issued the following statement:

(*1*) *The Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation, after due consideration, finds that the American nation is suffering from a mass war neurosis.*

(2) *This neurosis has, for direct cause, the present hostilities between the American nation and the Eastern Powers.*

(*3*) *The most expedient method of relieving this neurosis (or any neurosis) is the elimination of the causative agent(s).*

(*4*) *We therefore recommend the immediate termination of hostilities. Respectfully, etc.*

The report was greeted with anything but approval by New Washington's upper echelons. To be sure, John Morgridge did smile a brown smile, and Enoch Odell was heard to mumble, "Surprise, surprise!" But a Kansas Senator fulminated for four hours on the Senate floor, a special subcommittee was appointed to root out Un-American noises in the writings of the members of the Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation, and General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew was heard to threaten martial law on eighteen separate and distinct occasions.

Happily for the Bureau of NPC, new data arrived at this crucial moment: five Alabama counties seceded from the Union, the president of the NAM and the president of the CIO jumped hand in hand into a New Chicago elevator shaft, and the Chief Executive of the United States took off with

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the Veep for a fishing trip in Lake Champlain (a center of radioactivity since 1956). The Bureau decided that this new material invalidated their former conclusions, and demanded a week to consider these new developments, an extension which was grudgingly granted by H. H. Bartholomew, now *de facto* President.

After a great deal of discussion of these data and even more discussion of the speech of the Senator from Kansas, the Bureau issued a second recommendation:

(1) *The American nation is suffering from a war neurosis. Since the cause of the neurosis is not expendable (see attached brief), some method of counteracting this neurosis must be found.*

(2) *It is recommended that all available propaganda material be requisitioned for a campaign designed to encourage an attitude of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die"[2] on the part of the populace. A concentration on the pleasures of the moment should do much to eliminate the fear of destruction on the morrow. Respectfully, etc.*

This paper was accompanied by a long and intricate psychological analysis of the Stoic philosophers and a copy of Mr. Housman's poem about cherry blossoms. All this was greeted with enthusiasm by President Bartholomew. His enthusiasm did not diminish appreciably even when John Morgridge called to protest at great length that the populace had, indeed, no pleasures of the moment to enjoy. The majority, the Commissioner reminded the President, were underfed, undernourished, and underclothed; umpty-leven per cent of national production was going into weapons, war aid, and Dinah; and even the simple pleasures of fresh air and green fields were getting harder and harder to find as America moved underground and as bacteria and radioactivity killed off more and more cherry trees.

The President was unmoved by this argument; but he was greatly disturbed by a mighty roar arising from the office of the Director of Production to the effect that any plan to make drunkards, addicts, fornicators, and debauchees out of the American working force would be fought by all the power industries could command.

In their third meeting, the Bureau discussed the remarks of the director of production at some length, the speech of the Senator from Kansas at some length, their own and each others' books ("Was it you wrote that article on Pavlov?") at no small length, and, finally, took into consideration the following new data:

(1) The latest enemy weapon, a rocket bomb designed to parachute small packages of heroin, was having a decided effect on absenteeism in the midwest.

(2) In the preceding week, 157 officers and 389 enlisted men of the Army's

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Internal Security Police Force had been overpowered by citizens and robbed of money and weapons.

(3) Births were down 24 per cent over the preceding year, the Census Report indicated; the American Medical Association estimated that illegal abortions were up 85 per cent. Other production continued to drop.

In desperation, the Bureau came out with a program for religious indoctrination which was denounced by President Bartholomew as an obvious violation of the Constitutional principle of separation of church and state. (Besides, there had been a leak and the National Bureau of Clergymen, with a noble show of self-sacrifice, was denouncing the whole thing as blasphemous in the extreme; and union heads were howling the whole thing down as "pie in the sky by and by.")

Finally, when their fourth proposal, a program of medals and awards for increased production, was rejected on the grounds that it wasn't working; and their fifth idea, that of a renewed hate campaign directed against the enemy within and without, was downed on the grounds that it was being done and wasn't working either; and when their sixth idea, that of rigid thought-control, was rejected by Bartholomew on very sound Constitutional grounds (to say nothing of the fact that Bartholomew knew full well he didn't have enough manpower in the Army to do the job), the Bureau of NPC threw up its hands and went home — having been duly relieved of their security ratings, their identity cards, and their passes to Dinah's memory files.

At this point, over the loud and lengthy protests of Enoch R. Odell, Director of Cybernetics, President Bartholomew marched the Army in and took Dinah over.

He also instituted a program of universal military training for all healthy males and females from twelve to 80, in order to (as he put it to the Congress of the United States) "gird up the loins of the man in the street."

V

"Of course, Enoch," (President Bartholomew had said), "you'll be kept on as director, since the Harvard Mark Fifty-four *is*, after all, your baby; but General Compson, here, will have to clear on all the material fed into the information and problem channels for the next few weeks, and, of course, he'll be liaison man between you and the White House."

For three or four days, Enoch's consumption at Sammy's on Five increased enormously while he plotted, fumed, and sneered; but as the military mind got more and more enmeshed in the unfathomable intricacies of Dinah's thinking processes, he began to feel himself again.

President Bartholomew was present when the problem of civilian morale

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(now more of a problem than ever) was fed into Dinah's circuits, three days after the Army took over. He heard the exasperated sputtering which came through her vocal centers as she reported "No references." And he beat a hasty retreat to the White House in order not to have to listen to Odell's triumphant chuckling.

"Well, damn it," he howled at the hapless General Compson, "give her the references!" So for the next week a committee of sociologists shoveled Ph.D. theses and documents and statistics into Dinah's information chutes. And the Bureau of NPC was called up again (and issued security ratings, identity cards, and passes to Dinah's memory files) and spent a week seeing how much Freud, Jung and Adler Dinah could absorb.

Even up on Eleven Odell could feel the vibration as Dinah dug out on fifteen of her 90 levels to make new filing room. It took her three days to digest the material. Then she rested quiet, occupied with nothing more than the routine course of the war. Bartholomew arrived with built-in fanfare to witness the solution of the morale problem with his own eyes.

"Operation Morale" was coded, fed into Dinah, rattled around for maybe twenty seconds in the unknown recesses of that mind without emotion, and finally produced a response: "Cut out the defective circuits."

Bartholomew looked impressed, but puzzled. Dinah continued: "It is clear that mass frontal lobotomy is the only practical solution to this problem."

"Ye Gods," sighed Morgridge. "Practical, she calls it."

Bartholomew raged. "Compson, how do you explain this situation? What kind of data have you been giving this machine? You did, did you not, personally check on everything that went into her in the past two weeks? Then how —"

Odell graciously rescued the intimidated Compson. "Sir, if I may venture a solution: Dinah is obviously taking her newly acquired knowledge of psychology and her own knowledge of herself and answering the problem in these terms. She knows that neurosis is a result of conflicting neural impulses; she knows that if two impulses conflict in her 'mind,' the techs disconnect one of them. Therefore, the only answer she can see is to chop out the areas of the brain that are causing the conflict."

"But this is impossible!" roared the President.

"You wouldn't fool me, Horace? So let us feed the problem back in, but inhibit the solution just given." This was done; Dinah played with the idea for a moment, activated her vocal centers, and replied, "Insufficient references."

"By God," raged Bartholomew, "if she thinks she can get away with that kind of insubordination . . . By God, no subordinate of mine has

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sneered at me in thirty years of Army life, and they're not going to start now; a little respect is due the position I hold. . . ."

"Now, Horace," soothed Odell, "Dinah hasn't any emotions, and she didn't sneer at you. Calm down." He picked up the phone and dialed Dinah. "What information are you missing, girl?"

Well, turned out that what she needed mainly was more primary information, fewer subjective evaluations of phenomena and more phenomena; more of the raw material, in short, from which the Ph.D. theses had been written. "Try movies, fiction, and the like," suggested Odell. "Biggest molders of the American mind."

First they gave her the movies. The comedies went down fairly smoothly. But the Valentino and Gable pictures set off a binge of building on the Eightieth to Eighty-eighth Levels. And Dinah began acting oddly. The techs swore up and down to Odell that she was panting after she got through filing and coding each new film. After digesting a particularly vile South American film, she began to vibrate whole floors with a "boomp, boomp, boomp" that had even mousy General Compson tapping his feet.

Then came the novels. *Pamela* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *I Married a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* were tossed in together with supreme military indiscrimination. And outside of a rumor current among the techs that after digesting *Forever Amber*, Dinah spent fifteen minutes divesting her main control boards of all their decorative shielding, the White House got no more troubling reports.

The Smithsonian was ransacked for 1957 editions of *Wonderful Wonder Romances*, pre-war copies of *Turgid Love Tales* and collector's issues of *Interstellar Passion Romance*. Dinah just sat there and took it all in.

And just as H. H. Bartholomew was again girding his loins and readying his fanfare for the final submission of "Operation Morale" to the Harvard Mark Fifty-four, the Harvard Mark Fifty-four, now very sure she was Dinah, kicked her techs out and completely insulated her 90 floors of New Washington and her 30 floors of New Boston and her 50 floors of New Gotham from all intruders (muttering, the techs insisted, "I want to be alone"). She also shut down completely on all operations — except defensive ones.

Odell roared. So did Bartholomew — though not with precisely the same intonation.

VI

The Commissioner of Internal Security tipped back his chair, spat accurately, and uncorked the fifth of bourbon which he had smuggled into Odell's office under his coat. *Don't tell me the war neurosis has got you, Com-*

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missioner. The Commissioner sighed. "It's a tough world, Nucky my boy."

"As concise an analysis as I've heard in some little time," Odell admitted. "It takes our respected president some fifteen minutes of howling and screaming to come to the same conclusion. You got a giant brain, John. How'd you know so quick?"

"Well," admitted Morgridge, "my first clue was when the Daughters of the First Atomic War passed a resolution against Turkish cigarettes. Even domestically produced Turkish cigarettes. Very sad. And my second hint was the shouting conversion of the President's cabinet to Shintoism. Very significant. And my third clue — but need I continue? Suffice it to say that my analytic brain quickly sized up the situation when Our Gal Dinah refused to shoot off any more rockets or cook up any more ways of massacring them damn types on the other side."

"This was your big clue, hah?"

"Aiuh. When the generals have to figure out their own strategy and shoot off their own rockets, things have come to a pretty pass. All I can say is I'm real gratified to see that Dinah is keeping the defensive machinery working real good. I'd hate to see me spread all around the countryside just because she's in a mood. But what disturbs me is not that the soldier boys have to do their own work, but that all the promises Horace made me about Dinah doing my office's work seem to be going down the drain. And I can't do any more now about civilian morale than I could before Dinah started in on them." *Feel inadequate, hah? Don't feel bad, you got all kinds company.*

"Don't feel bad, kid. Your old Uncle Enoch has things under control — more or less. I've persuaded friend Horace to reconvene the Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation and turn them loose on Dinah. See what her big-maladjustment is."

"Well, yummy. I can see now the consternation among the graybeards when Dinah whips a 'No References' out of her pocket when they ask her 'Do you like little boys or little girls?' " Morgridge fastidiously cleared his mouth of tobacco and drank. *From the bottle. Infantilism.*

He was almost right, at that. When the Bureau of NPC had got through a three-day conference with Odell and the chairman picked up the phone and called Dinah, there was no small amount of initial confusion. "Ah — Dinah —" inquired the good doctor, "what — ah — what is the first thing you can remember?"

"$E = mc^2$," Dinah replied grudgingly.

"Well," said the chairman. "Do you suppose — no, she can't hate her father and mother; and — I don't see how her toilet training can be at fault. Maybe we —"

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Two hours later they called again. Four days later they had a diagnosis: Dinah was lovesick. Her vocal mechanism had been re-set to approximate the voice of an adolescent female. Half the time all that came through it was "Stardust," "Whispering" and "Lover, Come Back to Me." As nearly as anyone could find out, the new space she was digging on Ninety-five was to be utilized in wall space where photographs of current cinema stars could be displayed. From time to time, as she played ancient phonograph records, a cessation of cerebral action (" 'Swoon' is the historical term," the report explained) would set in.

"What has apparently happened," explained the chairman, "is that a considerable amount of material placing a positive value on such behavior has been presented to Dinah. This type of romantic behavior ('Hollywood' is the historical term) having been established as a 'good' thing by sheer bulk of material, the machine began to attempt an approximation of this behavior. Having a huge mass of psychological material at her disposal, she was able to create new circuits, presumably occupying much of the space recently created by her, circuits designed to approximate the emotions of an adolescent human female.

"Now, since the material furnished Dinah places a high value on the maintenance of these emotions in the face of paternal and societal opposition, Dinah has thrown up extremely strong defenses against those who would deny her the enjoyment of these feelings." Attached to the report to the President was a long discussion of the bureaucracy as Father-Image, which most of the bureaucracy ignored. There was, however, no solution proposed.

The Bureau was relieved of all its many cards, its ratings, and its passes, and went home.

A conference between Odell and the near-hysterical Bartholomew ended in a decision to pull the Army out and give the Director *carte blanche*. Odell, cool and confident, marched out of the White House, returned to his office and picked up the phone to Dinah. She was singing "Whose Izzy is he, is he yours or is he mine?" and vibrating twenty floors as she stomped some newly-created foot. *Heaven help us if she finds in that stuff we gave her something on How to Jitterbug.*

VII

Two days went by before President Bartholomew, troubled at the lack of promised results, paid Odell a surprise visit. "Don't announce me. I'll go right in."

He found Odell surrounded with cigarette butts, reading over the phone in a tender if sleepy voice:

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". . . Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning glew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey . . ."

"Odell!" shouted the Chief Executive. "What in hell are you doing?"

"Hah? Oh, hello, Horace. Just a minute while I finish this poem."

"What do you mean, just a minute? This is the way you're going to fix Dinah up, eh? Fill her up even fuller with romantic hogwash?" Bartholomew reached over and hung up for Odell. "Come along with me, Enoch. Either you've succumbed to this wave of crackpotism or you've sold out to the other side."

"Oh, come now, Horace, don't be ridiculous." Odell stretched. He had been up all night reading.

"Then will you explain yourself?"

Odell smiled. "Nope."

Nor would he explain himself to the hastily reconvened Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation. The Bureau consulted with Morgridge, with Odell's secretary, and with Sammy on Five, and came up with the following analysis:

(1) *The patient, Enoch R. Odell, has, in the past six months, consumed over two thousand milk shakes at the milk bar on Five known as Sammy's (see attached affidavit of Samuel R. Frank, prop.)*

(2) *The patient is unmarried, and has apparently never entered into any mutually satisfactory relationship with any member of the opposite sex. This apparently results from an inordinate dependence on the Mother-figure. These are the direct causes of the heightened consumption of milk beverages. (See the attached technical analysis of which this is a résumé.)*

(3) *In the past two days, according to the abovementioned Samuel R. Frank, Odell's consumption of milk beverages has dropped to zero.*

(4) *It is our considered opinion that Odell has found in the machine known as Dinah a long-needed love object (and perhaps a Mother-figure) and that the reported telephoning was an attempt to seduce Dinah over the telephone.*

(5) *Inasmuch as Odell's specialized skills are of the greatest importance in the present crisis, we recommend that he be deprived of direct contact with the machine, that a branch of Sammy's Milk Bar be set up in his offices, and that he be kept on the job. He is not dangerous. Respectfully, etc.*

Somebody thought to check the effect of this attempted seduction on the machine. They asked her, "What do you think of Odell, Dinah?"

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"He's nice," she replied, "but he's not my type." Then she went back to work (she was working very hard on something) humming, "I wanna get married."

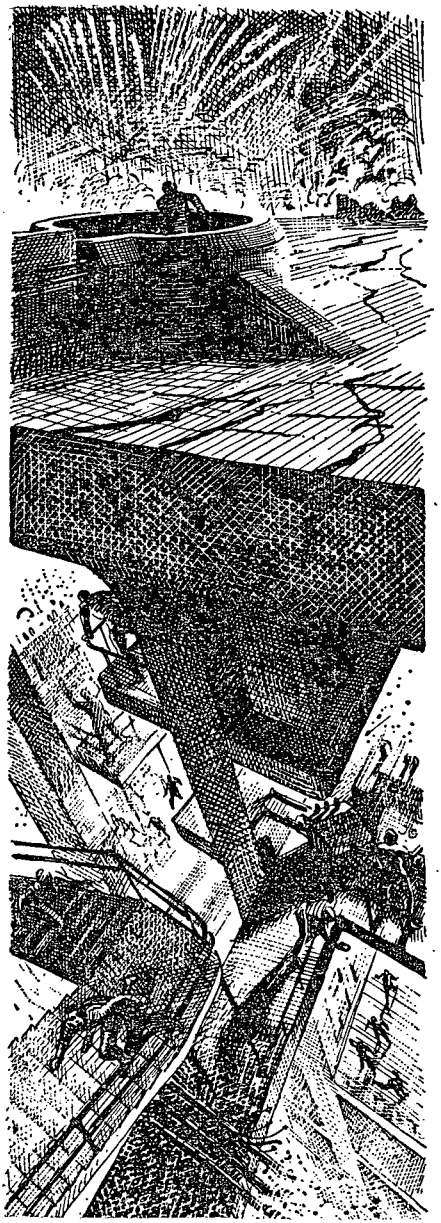
VIII

The status remained at quo for another week; enemy bombs exploded harmlessly — more or less — in the upper atmosphere as Dinah's tracers got hold of their vitals. American bombs flew off now and again as often as the boys with the slipsticks could figure out a trajectory. And Dinah continued to shuffle and build.

Finally, at 12:53 on January 15, Dinah opened one corner of her defenses, shoved out a tentacle, tapped a power circuit, and blew out all the power in New Washington, New Gotham, and New Boston.

Before the President could light a single candle, a roar shivered the whole of New Washington as a much-modified Wac Corporal tore up the main elevator shaft, through the elevator cars and the concrete shielding and into the stratosphere.

Techs with kerosene lanterns discovered that Dinah's defenses were down. They also discovered that every circuit in the whole 90 floors had been fused. Then phones began ringing. It seemed that every atomic and bacteriological rocket in the hemisphere had blasted off. Observers followed them outside the orbit of Mars, where they exploded harmlessly.



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Odell climbed eleven flights of stairs to the surface to see the fun. The air was white with parachutes. The autopilots (run by Dinah) had taken over, locked the controls, and sent the planes of the American Army into Hudson Bay. And every Army vehicle lumbered toward the nearest body of water, heedless of the frantic manipulations of its crew who (except for a few fanatics) were forced to jump at the water's edge.

Odell had no idea how the gunpowder had been exploded, what radiation had been rigged to accomplish it, but every grain in the hemisphere had blown. H. H. Bartholomew was wounded in the hip when his sidearm exploded, and a few thousand lives were lost in ammo dump blowups which made Black Tom look like Sunday school; but casualties were light — especially in comparison, it was thought, with those that would result when the enemy learned of the country's defenseless state.

Odell remained calm — and in this he was unique. He checked with Palomar and ascertained that the rocket that had shot up the New Washington elevator shaft had circled the earth twice, had been joined by another rocket, and was now circling Saturn. *The most romantic of the planets. Imagine making love by the light of the rings. To say nothing of nine moons.* "By the light," he sang happily, "of the silvery moons . . ." *I want to spoon? Mmm. And June doesn't exist on Saturn. What will they rime with? There will be problems. Hoo-hah.*

When it became clear that peace had broken out, there was a fine debauch all over America — all over the world, in fact — followed by wholesale fallings of governments. When it became clear that Dinah was, in some mysterious way, responsible for all this, Enoch R. Odell was swept into the White House by a thundering majority. His first act was to set up a milk bar in the East Room; he sat there long hours in the evening conferring with his Secretary of State, John Morgridge.

"Still think I was hot for Dinah's body?" smirked the Chief Executive.

"Well, weren't you?" To make Morgridge happy, President Odell had installed a self-polishing spittoon in the East Room and added a bottle of sour mash bourbon to the stock of the milk bar.

"Well, look at it this way. What was the problem we were trying to get at? I answer for you this rhetorical question: the end of the war neurosis. Now, fantastic as it may (or, then again, may not) seem, the first solution proposed by the BNPC was the only valid one: end the war. Right?"

"Say on."

"So, when Our Gal Dinah tore off on a romantic binge, Our Hero, Enoch R. Odell, decided that, indeed, there is only one logical course. Since I, like Dinah, have suffered through the torments of having plenty love and no object, I see my choices clear. *Primo* — I can teach her to sublimate — eat

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milk shakes, as it were. Not too real. *Secundo* — I can fill her up with Puritanical inhibitions to jag her back to a semblance of rational, non-emotional behavior. Read her Jonathan Edwards, in short.

"This I reject too. This is the way to make sickies, and I don't want to be nursemaid to any sicky machine. And finally, I can try to bring this romantic adolescent love along into a romantic mature love and find the girl a love object. Eureka, say I to myself, Enoch, you have struck it!"

Morgridge spat. "So you sacrificed yourself for your country and proposed yourself as love-object. Noble of you. Greater love hath no man than this —"

"Pooh. And likewise bah." Odell lit a violet-scented cigarette and poured a milk shake. "I read her all kinds of trash designed to give her a realistic view of that Old Black Magic. 'Falling in love with love is nothing but makebelieve.' 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.' *Und so weiter.* And as I saw the old girl growing up, I told her all about this fairy prince on the other side of the world name of Stalin Mark Umpty-ump."

"Clever, clever."

"I thought so." Odell smiled modestly. "As I had suspected in my heart of hearts, Dinah found a way to contact this machine (I'd given her the *Love Laughs at Locksmiths* and *Love Will Find A Way* routines). I'm not sure how she did it — ether waves, terrestial vibrations, or what-not — but she made it. She seduced him. First she had to convince him he was a him and then talk him into building his own emotional circuits. Real Venus and Adonis routine. But Never Underestimate the Power of A —"

"And then they eloped."

"Precisely. And naturally Romeo and Juliet couldn't let the houses of Montague and Capulet go on slitting each other's throats, so they sabotaged our war efforts so well that we'd need thirty years to build it up again. And they jammed the essential parts of their emotional and rational circuits into two rockets and took off for parts unknown, blowing out for good all of themselves they had to leave behind."

"Lovely, lovely," Morgridge unwrapped a new plug.

"Yep. Just like all the books say, only way to end war is with love."

To Serve Man

(O PIONEERS!)

SURGERY ON BOY OPENS
NEW GASTRONOMIC FIELDS

— *Headline in Oakland (Calif.)* Tribune, *Aug. 28, 1953*

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The Gods of the Dana

[*The Tuatha dé Danann, the Race of the Gods of Dana, are the elder gods of Erin, known also as the Shee.*]

The gods of the Dana are lords of one small green island,
They are tall, they have yellow hair, their brows are wide,
They have magical golden harps swung from their shoulders,
Their eyes are gray and look not to either side.

They go forth at dusk on fiery faëry horses
Through flowering thorn and over the peaty streams,
Kings of the ruined raths and the gull-loud places,
Of the fisherman's song and the lonely herd-girl's dream:

Mider the Green, bearing the spiralling alder,
And sun-gold Lugh in a nimbus of feathered light,
Brighet the Horned scattering pale moon-fire
And Angus the Young circled with birds of white.

They are gods of this island only, narrow their kingdom
Bounded on every side by the screaming seas.
No one prays to them now in the windy mornings —
To Him on the Rood the wild Gael bend their knees.

Yet they ride from the hills at dusk, the gods of the Dana!
They guard the gates of the island east and west.
From the foe without and within they shield her beauty,
Against their terrible hearts her head is pressed.

For they have no other love, the gods of the Dana,
And they gave her long ago the gifts of the Shee:
The eyes of youth, and the tongue of a linnet singing,
And the hunger and pride and grief of the restless sea.

LEAH BODINE DRAKE

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Avram Davidson, scholar and critic, has the most beautiful beard that has ever visited our office, and one of the most attractively wide-ranging minds, full of fascinating lore on arcane and unlikely subjects. For his first fiction outside of specialized Jewish publications, he takes his theme from an offtrail branch of folklore, the baffling rime-games sung by little girls, with distinctive and delightful results.

My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

FASHION, NOTHING BUT FASHION. Virus X having in the medical zodiac its course half i-run, the physician (I refuse to say "doctor" and, indeed, am tempted to use the more correct "apothecary") — the physician, I say, tells me I have Virus Y. No doubt in the Navy it would still be called Catarrhal Fever. They say that hardly anyone had appendicitis until Edward VII came down with it a few weeks before his coronation, and thus made it fashionable. He (the medical man) is dosing me with injections of some stuff that comes in vials. A few centuries ago he would have used herbal clysters. . . . Where did I read that old remedy for the quinsy ("putrescent sore throat", says my dictionary)? *Take seven weeds from seven meads and seven nails from seven steeds.* Oh dear, how my mind runs on. I must be feverish. An ague, no doubt.

Well, rather an ague than a pox. A pox is something one wishes on editors . . . strange breed, editors. The females all have names like Lulu Ammabelle Smith or Minnie Lundquist Bloom, and the males have little horns growing out of their brows. They must all be Quakers, I suppose, for their letters invariably begin, "Dear Richard Roe" or "Dear John Doe," as if the word *mister* were a Vanity . . . when they write at all, that is; and meanwhile Goodwife Moos calls weekly for the rent. If I ever have a son (than which nothing is more unlikely) who shows the slightest inclination of becoming a writer, I shall instantly prentice him to a fishmonger or a Master Chimney Sweep. Don't write about Sex, the editors say, and don't write about Religion, or about History. If, however, you *do* write about History, be sure to add Religion and Sex. If one sends in a story about a celibate atheist, however, do you think they'll buy it?

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In front of the house two little girls are playing one of those clap-handie games. Right hand, left hand, cross hands on bosom, left hand, right hand . . . it makes one dizzy to watch. And singing the while:

My *boy* friend's *name* is *Jel*lo,
He *comes* from *Cin*cin*ello*,
With a *pim*ple on his *nose*
And *three* fat toes;
And *that's* the *way* my *sto*ry goes!

There is a pleasing surrealist quality to this which intrigues me. In general I find little girls enchanting. What a shame they grow up to be *big* girls and make our lives as miserable as we allow them, and oft-times more. Silly, nasty-minded critics, trying to make poor Dodgson a monster of abnormality, simply because he loved Alice and was capable of following her into Wonderland. I suppose they would have preferred him to have taken a country curacy and become another Pastor Quiverful. A perfectly normal and perfectly horrible existence, and one which would have left us all still on *this* side of the looking glass.

Whatever was in those vials doesn't seem to be helping me. I suppose old Dover's famous Powders hadn't the slightest fatal effect on the germs, bacteria, or virus (viri?), but at least they gave one a good old sweat (ipecac) and a mild, non-habit-forming jag (opium). But they're old-fashioned now, and so there we go again, round and round, one's train of thought like a Japanese waltzing mouse. I used to know a Japanese who — now, stop that. Distract yourself. Talk to the little girls . . .

Well, that was a pleasant interlude. We discussed (quite gravely, for I never condescend to children) the inconveniences of being sick, the unpleasantness of the heat; we agreed that a good rain would cool things off. Then their attention began to falter, and I lay back again. Miss Thurl may be in soon. Mrs. Moos (perfect name, she lacks only the antlers) said, whilst bringing in the bowl of slops which the medicine man allows me for victuals, said, My Sister Is Coming Along Later And She's Going To Fix You Up Some Nice Flowers. Miss Thurl, I do believe, spends most of her time fixing flowers. Weekends she joins a confraternity of over-grown campfire girls and boys who go on hiking trips, comes back sunburned and sweating and carrying specimen samples of plant and lesser animal life. However, I must say for Miss Thurl that she is quiet. Her brother-in-law, the bull-Moos, would be in here all the time if I suffered it. He puts stupid quotations in other people's mouths. He will talk about the weather and I will not utter a word, then he will say, Well, It's Like You Say, It's Not The Heat But The Humidity.

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Thinking of which, I notice a drop in the heat, and I see it is raining. That should cool things off. How pleasant. A pity that it is washing away the marks of the little girls' last game. They played this one on the sidewalk, with chalked-out patterns and bits of stone and broken glass. They chanted and hopped back and forth across the chalkmarks and shoved the bits of stone and glass — or were they potshards — "potsie" from potshard, perhaps? I shall write a monograph, should I ever desire a Ph.D. I will compare the chalkmarks with Toltec emblems and masons' marks and the signs which Hindoo holy men smear on themselves with wood ashes and perfumed cow dung. All this passes for erudition.

I feel terrible, despite the cool rain. Perhaps without it, I should feel worse.

Miss Thurl was just here. A huge bowl of blossoms, arranged on the table across the room. Intricately arranged, I should say; but she put some extra touches to it, humming to herself. Something ever so faintly reminiscent about that tune, and vaguely disturbing. Then she made one of her rare remarks. She said that I needed a wife to take care of me. My blood ran cold. An icy sweat (to quote Catullus, that wretched Priapist), bedewed my limbs. I moaned. Miss Thurl at once departed, murmuring something about a cup of tea. If I weren't so weak I'd knot my bedsheets together and escape. But I am terribly feeble.

It's unmanly to weep. . . .

Back she came, literally poured the tea down my throat. A curious taste it had. Sassafrass? Bergamot? Mandrake root? It is impossible to say how old Miss Thurl is. She wears her hair parted in the center and looped back. Ageless . . . ageless . . .

I thank whatever gods may be that Mr. Ahyellow came in just then. The other boarder (upstairs), a greengrocer, decent fellow, a bit short-tempered. He wished me soon well. He complained he had his own troubles, foot troubles . . . I scarcely listened, just chattered, hoping the Thurl would get her hence. . . . Toes . . . something about his toes. Swollen, three of them, quite painful. A bell tinkled in my brain. I asked him how he spelt his name. A-j-e-l-l-o. Curious, I never thought of that. Now, I wonder what he could have done to offend the little girls? Chased them from in front of his store, perhaps. There is a distinct reddish spot on his nose. By tomorrow he will have an American Beauty of a pimple.

Fortunately he and Miss Thurl went out together. I must think this through. I must remain cool. Aroint thee, thou mist of fever. This much is obvious: There are sorcerers about. Sorce*resses*, I mean. The little ones made rain. And they laid a minor curse on poor Ajello. The elder one has struck me in the very vitals, however. If I had a cow it would doubtless

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be dry by this time. Should I struggle? Should I submit? Who knows what lies behind those moss-colored eyes, what thoughts inside the skull covered by those heavy tresses? Life with Mrs. and Mr. Moos is — even by itself — too frightful to contemplate. Why doesn't she lay her traps for Ajello? Why should I be selected as the milk-white victim for the Hymeneal sacrifice? Useless to question. Few men have escaped once the female cast the runes upon them. And the allopath has nothing in his little black bag, either, which can cure.

Blessed association of words! Allopath — Homeopath — *homoios*, the like, the same, *pathos*, feeling, suffering — *similia similibus curantur* —

The little girls are playing beneath my window once more, clapping hands and singing. Something about a boy friend named Tony, who eats macaroni, has a great big knife and a pretty little wife, and will always lead a happy life . . . that must be the butcher opposite; he's always kind to the children. . . . Strength, strength! The work of a moment to get two coins from my wallet and throw them down. What little girl could resist picking up a dime which fell in front of her? "*Cross my palm with silver, pretty gentleman!*" — eh? And now to tell them my tale . . .

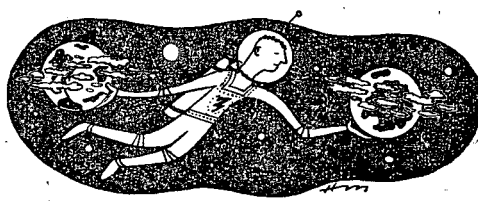
I feel better already. I don't think I'll see Miss Thurl again for a while. She opened the door, the front door, and when the children had sung the new verse she slammed the door shut quite viciously.

It's too bad about Ajello, but every man for himself.

Listen to them singing away, bless their little hearts! I love little girls. Such sweet, innocent voices.

My *boy* friend will *soon* be *heal*thy.
He *shall* be *very wealth*y.
No *wo*man shall *harry*
Or *seek* to *marry*;
Two and *two* is *four*, and *one* to *carry!*

It will be pleasant to be wealthy, I hope. I must ask Ajello where Cincinello is.



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Star Lummox

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

(*Third of Three Parts*)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIRBERGER

SYNOPSIS: *Hroshijud, the home planet of the highly intelligent, many-sexed, eight-legged Hroshii, lies over 900 light-years from Earth, and man has touched there only once, by an accidental jump through spatial congruencies on the pioneer interstellar voyage of the spaceship,* Trail Blazer, *100 years ago.*

John Thomas Stuart VIII smuggled home a pet from that trip, an appealing little beast which he christened LUMMOX — *a most fitting name as it grew and grew, thriving on every food from two-by-fours to scrap-iron, to the proportions of an outsize dinosaur. Playful, curious, obedient, and able to talk a little (with the voice and vocabulary of a four-year-old girl), it was still obviously an animal rather than an extra-terrestrial of human intelligence; it had no hands or other manipulative organs, such as every intelligent race must possess.*

Lummox became the playmate, friend and almost-brother of each successive generation of Stuarts; and to young JOHN THOMAS STUART XI *Lummox is closer than his dominatingly overprotective mother, and even closer than his lively precocious girl friend* BETTY SORENSON. *But even John Thomas, who understands Lummox better than any other human, has no understanding of the Hroshii — nor does any man until a Hroshij spaceship suddenly settles into an orbit about Earth and demands the return of a kidnaped scion of their race, upon threat of the complete annihilation of the planet . . . a feat of which their science is easily capable.*

For the Hroshii are exceedingly long-lived, so much so that one of our centuries is hardly a tenth of a lifetime, and mature slowly, with their manipulative limbs emerging only in late childhood. And the "pet" that spaceman

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Stuart found on Hroshijud was an infant destined to play a key role in one of the most important multisexual alliances in Hroshij history.

When the secret ultimatum of the Hroshii is delivered, Lummox is already a major concern of HENRY KIKU, *the shrewd, courteous and tough-minded Permanent Under Secretary of the Department of Spatial Affairs. Lummox has gone on a naughty rampage and damaged property in the little town of Westville; the aroused citizens are demanding the destruction of the star beast, and it is up to DepSpace somehow to save such a unique extra-terrestrial specimen for the xenologists to study. Lummox' own rash actions, in eating through the steel cage in which he is confined and crashing into the courtroom, force* SERGEI GREENBERG, *Mr. Kiku's top agent and probable successor, reluctantly to issue an order for the beast's destruction. An astute political maneuver later enables Greenberg to cancel the order; but a clerk's error routes the cancellation to Pluto.*

Mr. Kiku has other problems, too, from the arrogant stupidity of the political Secretary of his department, ROY MACCLURE, *to his own deep snake-phobia which makes it all but impossible for him to deal with the charming but medusa-headed Rargyllian* DR. FTAEML, *who acts as translator and go-between for the Hroshii.*

His intuition, fortunately, leads him to suspect that Lummox may indeed be an ugly duckling, and actually the swan whom the Hroshii are seeking; but while he strives to appease the possible destroyers of Earth, desperately checking up on Greenberg's misrouted cancellation, the Westville police are devoting themselves to the destruction of Lummox — no simple task, since his hide resists almost any weapon and his metabolism absorbs poison as food.

But John Thomas can take no chances; some time they will hit upon a lethal method. Cutting his ties with his own life, he runs away with Lummox into a deserted mountain area near Westville, hoping to hide out until the lynch fury dies down. In hiding, Lummox suddenly comes of age; his arms at last grow out.

Betty Sorenson, knowing John Thomas well enough to predict his plans, tracks them down; she realizes that the new manipulative hands prove Lummox to be of an intelligent race and safe from destruction as an animal. But it is too late. Air posses are combing the entire area. Finally a scout plane spots Lummox and his human friends; a police party lands and renders the three helpless with a stunning forcefield.

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XII

EIGHT FIGURES poured out the door of the ship, covered head to foot with heavy metal mesh. Each wore a helmet resembling a fencer's mask and carried as a back pack a field antigenerator. They trotted confidently in open double file toward the passage through the trees; as they struck the field they slowed slightly, sparks flew, and a violet nimbus formed around each. But on they came.

The second four were carrying a large metal-net cylinder, high as a man and of equal width. They balanced it easily up in the air. The man in the lead called out, "Swing wide of the beast. We'll get the kids out first, then dispose of him." He sounded quite cheerful.

The squad came up to the three, cutting around Lummox. "Easy! Catch them both," the leader called out. The barrel-like cage was lowered over Betty and John Thomas, settling slowly until the man giving orders reached inside and flipped a switch — whereupon it struck sparks and dropped to the ground.

He gave them a red-faced grin. "Feels good to get the molasses off you, doesn't it?"

Johnnie glared at him with his chin quivering, and replied insultingly while he tried to rub cramps out of his leg muscles. "Now, now!" the officer answered mildly. "No good to feel that way. You made us do it." He glanced up at Lummox. "Good grief! He *is* a big beast, isn't he? I'd hate to meet him in a dark alley, without weapons."

Johnnie found that tears were streaming down his face and that he could not stop them. "Go ahead!" he cried, his voice misbehaving. "Get it over with!"

"Eh?"

"He never meant any harm! So kill him quickly — don't play cat-and-mouse with him." He broke down and sobbed, covering his face with his hands. Betty put her hands on his shoulders and sobbed with him.

The officer looked distressed. "What are you talking about, son? We aren't here to hurt him. We have orders to bring him in without a scratch on him — even if we lost men in the process. Craziest orders I ever had to carry out."

Mr. Kiku was feeling good. Breakfast was not a burning lump in his middle; he felt no need to shop in his pill drawer, nor even a temptation to get out his real estate folders. The Triangular Conference was going well and the Martian delegates were beginning to talk sense. Ignoring the various

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amber lights on his desk he began singing: "*Frankie and Johnnie were lovers . . . and oh boy how they could love . . . swore to be true to each other —*"

He had a fair baritone voice and no sense of pitch.

Best of all, that silly, confused Hroshian affair was almost over — and no bones broken. Good old Doc Ftaeml seemed to think that there was an outside chance of establishing diplomatic relations, so delighted the Hroshii had been at recovering their missing Hroshia.

Looking back, the things that had confused them were obvious. Who would have guessed that a creature half as big as a house and over a century old was a baby? Or that this race attained hands only when old enough to use them? For that matter, why was this Hroshia so much bigger than its co-racials? Its size had misled Greenberg and himself as much as anything.

No matter. By now Lummox was on his . . . *her* way to the Hroshian ship. No fuss, no ceremony, no publicity, and the danger was over. Could they actually have volatilized Terra? Just as well not to have found out. All's well that ends well. He went back to singing.

He was still singing when the "urgent" light began jittering and he delivered the last few bars into Greenberg's face: "*— just as true as the stars above!*" He added, "Sergei, can you sing tenor?"

"Why should you care, boss? That wasn't a tune."

"You're jealous. What do you want, son? See them off okay?"

"Unh, boss, there's a slight hitch. I've got Dr. Ftaeml with me. Can we see you?"

"What is it?"

"Let's wait until we are alone. One of the conference rooms?"

"Come into the office," Mr. Kiku said grimly. He switched off, opened a drawer, selected a pill and took it.

Greenberg and the medusoid came in at once; Greenberg flopped down in a chair as if exhausted, pulled out a cigarette, felt in his pockets, then put it away. Mr. Kiku greeted Dr. Ftaeml formally, then said to Greenberg, "Well?"

"Lummox didn't leave."

"Eh?"

"Lummox refused to leave. The other Hroshii are boiling like ants. I've kept the barricades up and that part of the space port around their landing craft blocked off. We've got to do something."

"Why? This development is startling, but I fail to see our responsibility. Why the refusal to embark?"

"Well —" Greenberg looked helplessly at Ftaeml.

The Rargyllian said smoothly, "Permit me to explain, sir. The Hroshia refuses to go aboard without her pet."

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They trotted confidently in open double file toward the passage through the trees . . .

"Pet?"

"The kid, boss. John Thomas Stuart."

"Exactly," agreed Ftaeml. "The Hroshia states that she has been raising 'John Thomases' for a long time; she refuses to go home unless she can take her John Thomas with her. She was quite imperious about it."

"I see," agreed Kiku. "To put it in more usual language the boy and the Hroshia are attached to each other. That's not surprising; they grew up together. But Lummox will have to put up with the separation, just as John Thomas Stuart had to. As I recall, he made a bit of fuss; we told him to shut up and shipped him home. That's what the Hroshii must do: tell her to shut up, force her, if necessary, into their landing craft and take her along. That's what they came here for."

The Rargyllian answered, "Permit me to say, sir, that by putting it into 'more usual language' you have missed the meaning. I have been discussing it with her in her own tongue."

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"Eh? Has she learned so quickly?"

"She has long known it. The Hroshii, Mr. Under Secretary, know their own language almost from the shell. One may speculate that this use of language almost on the instinctive level is one reason, perhaps *the* reason, why they find other languages difficult and never learn to use them well. The Hroshia speaks your language hardly as well as one of your four-year-old children, though I understand that she began acquiring it one of your generations ago. But in her own language she is scathingly fluent — as I learned to my sorrow."

"So? Well, let her talk. Words can't hurt us."

"She *has* talked — she has given orders to the commander of the expedition to recover her pet at once. Otherwise, she states, she will remain here and continue raising 'John Thomases.' "

"And," Greenberg added, "the commander has handed us an ultimatum to produce John Thomas Stuart at once — or else."

" 'Or else' meaning what I think it means?" Kiku answered slowly.

"The works," Greenberg said simply. "Now that I've seen their ground craft I'm not sure but what they can."

"You must understand, sir," Ftaeml added earnestly, "that the commander is as distressed as you are. But he must attempt to carry out the wishes of the Hroshia. This mating was planned more than two thousand of your years ago; they will not give it up lightly. He cannot allow her to remain — nor can he force her to leave. He is very much upset."

"Aren't we all?" Mr. Kiku took out two more pills. "Dr. Ftaeml, I have a message for your principals. Please convey it exactly."

"I shall, sir."

"Please tell them that their ultimatum is rejected with contempt. Please —"

"Sir! I beg of you!"

"Attend me. Tell them that and do not soften it. Tell them that we tried in every way to help them, that we succeeded, and that they have answered kindness with threats. Tell them that their behavior is unworthy of civilized people and that the invitation to join the Community of Civilizations is withdrawn. Tell them that I spit in their faces — find an idiom of equal strength. Tell them that free men may die, but they are never bullied."

Greenberg was grinning widely and clasping both hands in the ancient sign of approval. Dr. Ftaeml seemed to grow pale under his outer chitin.

"Sir," he said, "I greatly regret being required to deliver this message."

Kiku smiled icily. "Deliver it as given. But before you do, find opportunity to speak to the Hroshia Lummox. You can do so?"

"Most assuredly, sir."

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"Tell her that the commander of the expedition, in his zeal, seems bent on killing the human, John Thomas Stuart. See that she understands what is threatened."

The Rargyllian arranged his mouth in a broad smile. "Forgive me, sir; I underestimated you. Both messages will be delivered, in the proper order."

"That is all."

"Your good health, sir." The Rargyllian turned to Greenberg, put a loose-jointed arm around his shoulders. "My brother Sergei, we have already found our way together out of one tight maze. Now, with the help of your spiritual father, we shall find our way out of another. Eh?"

"Right, Doc."

Ftaeml left. Kiku turned to Greenberg and said, "Get the Stuart boy here. Get him at once, yourself, personally. Umm . . . bring his mother, too. He's under age, isn't he?"

"Yes. Boss, what's the plan? You aren't going to turn him over to them? — after that wonderful kick in the teeth you handed them?"

"Of course I am. But on my own terms. I don't intend to let those animated pool tables think they can push us around. We'll use this to get what we want. Now get going!"

"I'm gone."

Mr. Kiku stayed at his desk, checking papers with part of his mind while letting his subconscious feel out the problem of Lummox. He had a strong hunch that tide was at flood — for humans. It was necessary to judge how to ride it. He was in this reverie when the door opened and the Most Honorable Mr. Roy MacClure walked in. "There you are, Henry! Pull yourself together, man — Beulah Murgatroyd is coming to call."

"Beulah who?"

"Beulah Murgatroyd. The creator of the Pidgie-Widgie stories for children. You know — *Pidgie-Widgie on the Moon*, *Pidgie-Widgie Goes to Mars*, *Pidgie-Widgie and the Space Pirates*. Now she's taken Pidgie-Widgie on the air and he's the top kids show by *any* rating. So comical the grownups follow it, too. And . . . well, Beulah Murgatroyd is the power behind 'The Friends of Lummox.' That's what she wants us to talk about."

"What in heaven's name are 'The Friends of Lummox'?"

"You know. That bust we made in that silly case out west about the monster that turned out to be this Hoorussian Lummox. Well, after Pidgie-Widgie started telling all his little friends about this terrible thing, three million of 'em wrote back in the first twenty-four hours — by now half the kids on this continent are 'Friends of Lummox,' pledged to protect him from persecution. Not to mention the adults. So, this morning we —"

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"No."

"Now, look here, Henry —"

"Sir," said Mr. Kiku quietly, "we have no business with noisy, infantile pressure groups. Our business is foreign relations. When we are bothered by pressure groups, we should let our public relations people handle them; that is what they are for."

"What am I but a glorified public relations man?" MacClure answered angrily.

"Not true, sir. You have the prime policy responsibility. I carry out policy — within the limits of my job."

"Hummph! You set policy. You drive me like a horse. I'm beginning to realize it."

Mr. Kiku's private secretary called in by voice. "Mr. Kiku, is the Secretary with you? Mrs. Beulah Murgatroyd is waiting."

"Be right in," called out MacClure.

Kiku added quietly, "Mildred, see that she is entertained. There will be a slight delay."

"Yes, sir. The Secretary's senior aide is taking care of her."

"Good."

"There will be no delay," MacClure said to Mr. Kiku. "If you won't, you won't — though I'm disappointed in you. But I can't keep her waiting."

"Sit down, Mr. Secretary."

"Eh?"

"Sit down, sir. Even the mighty Mrs. Murgatroyd must wait on some things. A major emergency has come up; you will certainly have to face the Council about it — possibly a special session this evening."

The Secretary stared at him, then reached across Kiku's desk. "Uh, Mildred? This is the Secretary. Tell Commodore Murthi that I am unavoidably detained and that he is to do his best to keep Mrs. Murgatroyd happy."

"Yes, Mr. Secretary."

MacClure turned back. "Now, Henry, quit lecturing me and spill it."

Mr. Kiku began a full report of the new Hroshij crisis. Mr. MacClure listened without comment. Just as Mr. Kiku concluded his account of the rejection of the ultimatum the sound communicator again came to life. "Chief? Murthi here. Mrs. Murgatroyd has another appointment."

Mr. MacClure turned toward the voice. "Hush circuit?"

"Of course, sir."

"Listen, Jack, I'll be a few minutes yet. Keep her happy."

"But —"

"Make love to her, if necessary. Now switch off. I'm busy!" He turned

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back to Mr. Kiku and scowled. "Henry, you've shoved me out on a limb again. You've left me nothing to do but back your play."

"May I ask what the Secretary would have done?"

"Huh?" MacClure frowned. "Why, I would have said exactly what you said, I suppose . . . but in nastier language. I admit that I probably wouldn't have thought of cutting inside them through this Lummox creature. That was cute."

"I see, sir. It being a rejection of a formal ultimatum, what precautionary action would the Secretary have taken? I should add that I wanted to avoid having the department advise the Council to order battle stations for the entire planet."

"What are you saying? Nothing like that would have been necessary. I would have ordered the Inner Guard to close and blast them out of the sky, on my own responsibility."

"Suppose it turned out that their ship failed to blast out of the sky — and blasted back?"

"What? Preposterous!"

"Mr. Secretary, the only thing I have learned in forty years at this trade is that when you are dealing with 'Out There' nothing is preposterous."

"Well, I'll be . . ." He searched Mr. Kiku's face. "Are you holding something back? Do you have evidence that they might be able to carry out this preposterous threat?"

"No, sir."

"Well?"

"Mr. MacClure, in my country hardly more than three hundred years ago there lived a very valiant tribe. A small force of Europeans made certain demands on them — taxes, they called it. The chief was a brave man and his warriors were numerous and well trained. They knew the strangers had guns, but they even had some guns of their own. But mostly they relied on numbers and courage. They planned cleverly and caught the enemy in a box canyon. So they thought."

"Yes?"

"They had never heard of machine guns. They learned about them in a very final way — for they were very brave and kept coming on. That tribe is no more."

"But you still haven't given me evidence. After all, we are not an ignorant tribe of savages."

"Perhaps. Yet, after all, the machine gun of that era was only a minor improvement over the ordinary gun of the time. We have weapons which make a machine gun seem like a boy's knife. And yet . . ."

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"You are suggesting that these Hoorussians have weapons that would make our latest developments as useless as clubs. Frankly, I don't want to believe it and I don't. The power in the nucleus of the atom is the ultimate possible power in the universe. You know that, I know that. We've got it. No doubt they've got it, too, but we outnumber them millions to one and we are on our home grounds."

"So the tribal chief reasoned."

"Eh? Not the same thing."

"Nothing ever is," Mr. Kiku answered wearily. "I was not speculating about magic weapons beyond the concepts of our physicists; I was merely wondering what some refinement might do to a known weapon — some piece of tinkering already implicit in the theories. I don't know, of course. I know nothing of such things."

"Well, neither do I but — See here, Henry; I'm going to order that police action, right away."

"Yes, sir."

"Well? Don't sit there frozen-faced saying, 'Yes, sir.' You don't *know*, do you? So why shouldn't I do it?"

"I did not object, sir. Do you want a sealed circuit? Or do you want the base commander to report here?"

"Henry, you are without question the most irritating man in seventeen planets. I asked you why I should *not* do it?"

"I know of no reason, sir. I can only tell you why I did not recommend it to you."

"Well?"

"Because I did *not* know. And since I did not know, I did not choose to play Russian roulette with our planet at stake. Do you want to give the order, sir? Or shall I take care of the details?"

"Quit badgering me." He glared at his Under Secretary. "I suppose your next move is to threaten to resign."

Mr. Kiku grudged a small smile. "No, I will wait until after the police action. Then, if we are both alive, I will have been proved wrong on a major matter; my resignation will be necessary. May I add, sir, that I hope you are right? I would much rather enjoy a quiet old age than have my judgment vindicated posthumously."

MacClure worked his mouth but did not speak. Mr. Kiku went on quietly, "May I offer a suggestion to the Secretary in my official capacity?"

"What? Of course. You are required to by law. Speak up."

"May I urge that the attack commence in the next few minutes? We may achieve by haste what might fail by delay. BuAstro can supply us with the orbit elements of the enemy ship." Kiku leaned toward his communicator.

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It came to life before he could touch it. "Chief? Murthi here. I've done my best, but she —"

"Tell her I can't see her!"

"Sir?"

"Uh — butter it on. You know how. Now shut up and don't call me again."

"Aye aye, sir."

Mr. Kiku called BuAstro. "The chief ballistician, please — at once. Ah, Cartier — seal your end; this end is sealed. All right, I want the tactical elements of the —"

MacClure reached out and broke the connection. "All right," he said savagely, "you've outbluffed me."

"I was not bluffing, sir."

"All right, all right, you've convinced me that you have a wise head on you. I can't take a blind chance with the lives of five billion people any more than you can. Want me to crawl?"

"No, sir. But I am much relieved. Thank you."

"*You're* relieved? Now tell me how you intend to play this. I'm still in the dark."

"Very well, Mr. Secretary. In the first place I have sent for the Stuart boy —"

"The Stuart boy? Why?"

"To persuade him to go. I want his consent."

The Secretary looked as if he could not believe his ears. "Do I understand, Mr. Kiku, that after rejecting their ultimatum your only plan is to capitulate?"

"That is not how I would describe it."

"I don't care what diplomatese you phrase it in. We will not surrender the boy. I was not willing to take a risk blindly, but this is another matter. I will not surrender one human being no matter what the pressure is — and I can assure you that the Council will agree. There is such a thing as human dignity. I must add that I am astonished — and disgusted."

"May I continue, sir?"

"Well . . . go ahead. Speak your piece."

"No thought of surrendering the boy was ever in my mind. In the science of diplomacy appeasement had long been an exploded theory."

"But you said —"

"Please, sir. I know what I said. I sent for the boy to explore his own wishes. From what I know of him he may be willing, even eager."

MacClure shook his head. "It's not something we could permit, even if the lad were crazy enough to do it. Nine hundred light-years from other

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human beings? I would as soon offer poison to a baby."

"That's not the picture at all, sir. If I have his consent, I can keep the fact to myself during negotiations — play from a concealed ace. There is much to negotiate."

"Such as?"

"Their science. Their trade. A whole new volume of space. The possibilities can be only dimly seen."

MacClure stirred restlessly. "I'm not sure but what that attack is still the thing to do. Snuggling up to vermin who threaten us —"

"Mr. Secretary, if my plans do not work, or fail to meet your approval, then I will join you in shouting defiance at the sky. We should bargain — but bargain as men."

"Well . . . go on. Tell me the rest."

XIII

Mr. Kiku's wife let him sleep late the next morning. She did this occasionally, reasoning that no crisis was important enough to wake him when he needed rest. When he got to his office he found Wesley Robbins, Special Assistant Secretary for public relations, asleep in his chair. Robbins was not a diplomat, did not want to be one, and made a point of showing it.

"Good morning, Wes," Mr. Kiku said mildly.

"What's good about it?" Robbins chucked a copy of the Capital *Times* at the Under Secretary. "Seen this?"

"No."

"Twenty-three years in the newspaper business — to be scooped on my own beat."

Mr. Kiku read:

ALIEN INVADERS
THREATEN WAR! ! !
Demand Hostages

Capital Enclave, Sep. 12 (GP) — Space Secretary MacClure revealed today that the xenic visitors dubbed "Hroshii" now landed at Capital port have demanded, under threats of war, that the Federation . . .

Kiku scanned down, saw that a distortion of his answer to the Hroshii had been credited to Secretary MacClure, with no mention of the possibility of peaceful settlement. A trailer story reported the Chief of the

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General Staff as assuring Earth and all the federated planets that there was nothing to fear from the insolent aliens. A South Asian senator demanded to know what steps were being taken. Kiku glanced at it all but discarded the meaningless 90 per cent, including a blast from the Keep Earth Human League and a "We Stand at the Crossroads" editorial.

"Ain't that a mess?" Robbins demanded. "Where do you hide your cigarettes?"

"It does seem a rather lavish waste of paper," Kiku agreed. "In the arm of the visitor's chair."

"Well, how do we handle it? I was caught flat-footed. Why doesn't somebody tell me these things?"

"Just a moment." Mr. Kiku leaned to his desk. "Security? Ah, O'Neill — place more special police around the Hroshii landing craft —"

"You've got 'em, boss. But why doesn't somebody tell us these things?"

"A fair question. Whatever guard you are using, use more. There must not only be no riot; there must be no incidents. Station as many trained tension-dispersal technicians in the crowd as you can scrape up, then borrow more from other agencies. Then give special attention to lunatic-fringe organizations — xenophobic ones, I mean. Any trouble yet?"

"Nothing we couldn't snuff out. But I'm making no promises."

"Good! Keep in touch with me." Kiku turned to Robbins. "Do you know how the interview happened to be granted?"

"Do I act like it? He was going to the 'Tri Con' citation dinner, safe as houses. I got his approval on his speech, gave him his copy and passed the others around to the boys, with suggestions on how to play it. Everybody happy. I get up this morning feeling ninety and before I've had my coffee I feel a hundred and fifty. Know anybody wants my job? I'm going to study how to be a beachcomber."

"A reasonable thought. Wes, let me bring you up to date. Nothing was to be released about this matter until it was concluded, but now —" He quickly outlined the latest Hroshij crisis.

Robbins nodded, "I see. And Number One jerked the rug out from under you. A fine playmate."

"Well, we had better see him. Is he here?"

"Yes. I was waiting for you, pal. Will you hold him while I hit him? Or the other way around?"

"Whichever you wish. Shall we get it over with?"

The Secretary was in; they were admitted and MacClure got up to seat them. After which they just sat. Robbins waited for Mr. Kiku to speak, but Kiku held still, face expressionless, a statue carved of ebony.

MacClure began to fidget. "Well, Henry? This is a busy morning —"

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"I had thought that you would want to instruct us, Mr. Secretary."

"What for?"

"Have you seen the morning papers, sir?"

"Well — yes."

"There has been a change in policy. Assistant Secretary Robbins and I would like to be briefed on the new policy."

"What new policy?"

"Your new policy concerning the Hroshii, Mr. Secretary. Or are the newspapers in error?"

"Eh? Well, no, not precisely. Exaggerated of course. But no change in policy. I simply told the people what they were entitled to know."

"The people are entitled to know." Mr. Kiku fitted his fingers together. "Ah, yes. In a government based on free consent of free men the people are always entitled to know. An old bureaucrat, such as myself, sometimes loses track of that fundamental. Thank you for reminding me." He seemed lost in cosmic thought for a moment, then added, "I suppose the thing now is to repair my failure and tell the people everything."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Why, the whole story, Mr. Secretary. How through our own ignorance and disregard for the rights of others, we kidnaped a member of a civilized race. How blind luck alone kept that xenian alive. How as a result of this we now find our own planet threatened with destruction — and how a highly intelligent citizen of a friendly power (I refer to Dr. Ftaeml) assures us that these Hroshii can indeed destroy us. It would be necessary to tell them also that yesterday we were within minutes of ordering an attack on these xenians — but that we lost our nerve and decided to negotiate. Yes, we must tell them that."

Secretary MacClure's mouth was as wide as his eyes. "Heavenly days, Henry! Are you trying to set off riots?"

"Sir? I have taken countermeasures to prevent riots — xenophobia is always ready to flare up and *that* —" he gestured at the newspaper "— will have an inflammatory effect on some. But you must not be deterred. We bureaucrats become paternalistic; it is so much simpler to do what seems best and let the people know it afterwards. Mr. Secretary, you have kept in mind, of course, that this Secretariat of which you are a member is responsible not to the North American Union, nor even to the peoples of Earth, but to all sovereignties of the Federation, both on Terra and elsewhere?"

"What's that got to do with it? We're the leading power."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'? Not my little country certainly. No, I was thinking that this will now be settled by vote of the Council and I was wondering whether the Council might possibly vote to surrender one unim-

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portant citizen of North America rather than risk an interstellar war? I wonder how Mars will vote?"

The Secretary got up and strode up and down his office. He stopped at the far end and stared out at the Tower of Three Planets and the Hall of Civilizations, while Kiku sat quietly. Wes Robbins slumped in a chair, his bony legs stretched in front of him. He was trimming his nails with a pocket knife.

MacClure turned suddenly to Kiku. "See here, Henry, you confounded word splitter, I won't be bullied."

"Bullied, Mr. Secretary?"

"Yes, bullied. You know perfectly well that if we give the press these unnecessary details — that nonsense this Dr. Fatima or whatever his name is, this Rargyllian monster, filled you with — yes, and you threatening to tell the press that I got cold feet about an attack — that's a threat if I ever heard one! — you give 'em all that junk and we'd have a row in the Council that would be heard from here to Pluto! With the home governments sending special instructions to their delegates and maybe the Terran bloc getting outvoted. Right on top of this ticklish Triangular Conference it could be disastrous. Yes, that's the world . . . *disastrous.*" MacClure stopped and struggled for breath. "Well, you won't get away with it. You're fired! — understand me? *Fired!* I'll take care of having you removed for cause, or transferring you to the retired list, or whatever the red tape calls for, but you are done, right now."

"Very well, Mr. Secretary," Mr. Kiku said evenly and started for the door to his office.

In the silence Wes Robbins' knife clicked shut loudly. He stood up. "Hold it, Henry! Mac —"

Mr. MacClure looked around. "Huh? What's the matter with *you?* And don't call me 'Mac'; this is official business. I'm still Secretary around here."

"Yes, you are — for about two hours, maybe."

"What? Don't be ridiculous! Wes, you will force me to fire you too if you talk that way. Mr. Kiku, you are excused."

"Don't go away, Henry. Mac, are you a complete stuffed shirt? Remember, I knew you when you were a shorthorned Senator, anxious to get a two-inch squib in a gossip column. I liked you then. You seemed to have horse sense, which is scarce in this business. Now you are ready to dump me and I don't like you either. But tell me, for old times' sake: why are you anxious to cut your own throat?"

"What? Not *my* throat."

Robbins shook his head slowly. "Mac, you are dead set on scuttling yourself.

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Hadn't you better cut Henry's tongue out before the newsboys reach him? Here, you can borrow my knife."

"What?" MacClure looked stunned. He swung around and snapped, "Mr. Kiku! You are not to speak to the press. That's an order."

Robbins bit off some cuticle, spat it out, and said, "Mac, for Pete's sake! You can't both fire him and keep him from talking."

"Departmental secrets —"

"'Departmental secrets' my bald spot! Maybe you could fine him severance pay under the official-secrets rule but do you think that will stop him? Henry is a man with no fears, no hopes, and no illusions; you can't scare him. What he can tell the reporters will do you more harm if you classify it 'secret' than it would if you didn't try to gag him."

"May I say something?" asked the center of the storm.

"Eh? Go ahead, Mr. Kiku."

"Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I had no intention of telling the press about the messier aspects of this affair. I was simply trying to show, by *reductio ad absurdum*, that the rule of keeping the public informed can — like any rule — lead to disaster if applied blindly. I felt that you had been indiscreet, sir. I hoped to keep you from further indiscretions while we sought means to repair the damage."

MacClure turned to Robbins. "You see, Wes? You were barking up the wrong tree. Henry is an honorable man, even if we do have our differences. See here, Henry, I was too hasty. I honestly thought you were threatening me. Let's forget what I said about asking for your resignation and get on with our jobs. Eh?"

Robbins made a rude noise; Mr. Kiku answered gently, "No, Mr. Secretary, it wouldn't work. Once having been fired by you, I would not again be able to act with confidence under your delegated authority. A diplomat must always act with confidence; it is often his only weapon."

"Um . . . Well, all I can say is I'm sorry. I really am."

"I believe you, sir. May I make a last and quite unofficial suggestion?"

"Why, certainly, Henry."

"Kampf would be a good man to hold down my desk and keep routine moving until you work out your new team."

"Why, surely. But Henry —, we'll keep him there on a temporary basis and you think it over. We'll call it sick leave or something."

"No," Mr. Kiku answered coldly and turned again toward his own office.

Before he could reach it Robbins spoke up loudly. "Take it easy, you two. We aren't through." He spoke to MacClure: "You said that Henry was an honorable man. But you forgot something."

"Eh? What?"

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"I ain't."

Robbins went on, "Henry wouldn't do anything that wasn't cricket. Me, I was raised in a river ward and I'm not bothered by niceties. I'm going to gather the boys together and give 'em the word. I'm going to tell them where the body is buried, how the apple cart was upset, and who put the overalls in the chowder."

MacClure said angrily, "You hand out an unauthorized interview and you'll never hold another job with the administration!"

"Don't threaten me, you overripe melon. I'm not a career man; I'm an appointee. After I sing my song I'll get a job on the Capital *Upside Down* column and let the public in on the facts about life among the supermen."

MacClure stared at him. "You don't have any sense of loyalty at all."

"From you, Mac, that sounds real sweet. What are you loyal to? Aside from your political skin?"

Mr. Kiku interposed mildly, "That's not entirely fair, Wes. The Secretary has been quite firm that the Stuart boy must not be sacrificed to expediency."

Robbins nodded. "Okay, Mac, we'll give you that. But you were willing to sacrifice Henry's forty years of service to save your own ugly face. Not to mention shooting off that face without checking with *me*, just to grab a front-page story. I can't reform you and don't want to, but be sure that you are going to see your name in headlines, big ones . . . but for the last time. Unless —"

"What do you mean? — 'unless'?"

"Unless we put Humpty-Dumpty together again."

"Uh, how? Now look, Wes, I'll do anything within reason."

"You sure will." Robbins frowned. "There's the obvious way. We can serve Henry's head up on a platter. Blame that interview yesterday on him. He gave you bad advice. He's been fired and all is sweetness and light."

Mr. Kiku nodded. "That's how I had envisioned it. I'd be happy to cooperate — provided my advice is taken on how to conclude the Hroshij affair."

"Don't look relieved, Mac!" Robbins growled. "That's the obvious solution and it would work — because Henry is loyal to something bigger than he is. But that is not what we are going to do."

"But, if Henry is willing, then in the best interests of all con —"

"Stow it. It won't be Henry's head on the platter; it will be yours."

Their eyes locked. At last MacClure said, "If that is your scheme, Robbins, forget it and get out. If you are looking for a fight, you'll get one. The first story to break will be about how I had to fire you two for disloyalty and incompetence."

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Robbins grinned savagely. "I hope you play it that way. I'll have fun. But do you want to hear how it could be worked?"

"Well . . . go ahead."

"You can make it easy or hard. Either way, you are through. Now keep quiet and let me tell it! You're done, Mac. I don't claim to be a scholar of xenic affairs, but even I can see that civilization can't afford your county-courthouse approach to delicate relations with non-human races. So you're through. The question is: do you do it the hard way? Or do you go easy on yourself and get a nice puff in the history books?"

MacClure glowered but did not interrupt. "Force me to spill what I know, and one of two things happens. Either the Secretary General throws you to the wolves, or he decides to back you up and risk a vote of 'no confidence' from the Council. Which is what he would get. The Martian Commonwealth would gleefully lead the stampede, Venus would follow, the outer colonies and the associated xenic cultures would join in. At the end you would have most of the Terran nations demanding that the North American Union surrender this one individual to avert a bust-up of the Federation.

"All you have to do is to shove the first domino; all the others would fall — and you would be buried under the pile. But the easy way runs like this. You resign — but we don't publish the fact, not for a couple of weeks — Henry, do you think two weeks will be long enough?"

"It should be ample," Mr. Kiku agreed gravely.

"During that time you don't wipe your nose without Henry's permission. You don't say a word unless I okay it. Then you resign in a blaze of glory, with the conclusion of the Hroshian Affair to crown your career. Possibly some way can be found to kick you upstairs to a gaudier job — if you are a good boy. Eh, Henry?"

Mr. Kiku nodded.

MacClure looked around from Kiku's expressionless face to Robbins' contemptuous one.

"Suppose I told you both to go to hell?"

Robbins yawned. "It won't matter in the long run, believe me. After the administration falls, the new Secretary General will call Henry out of retirement, a safe man will be stuck in your place, and Henry will get on with out-maneuvering the Hroshii. Probably lose three days, maybe less. Whitewashing you is harder, but we mean to give you a break. Right, Henry?"

"It would be better so. Dirty linen is best kept in a cupboard."

MacClure chewed his lip. "I'll think it over."

"Good! And I'll wait while you do. Henry, why don't you get back to work? I'll bet that trick desk is lighted up like a Christmas tree."

"Very well." Mr. Kiku left the room.

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His desk did look like a fireworks celebration, with three blinking red lights and a dozen amber ones. He disposed of urgent matters, brushed off lesser ones, and began to reduce the stack in his basket, signing without bothering to consider whether his signature continued to carry authority.

He was just sustaining a veto on a passport for a very prominent lecturer — the last time the idiot had been off Earth, he had broken into a temple and taken pictures — when Robbins walked in and chucked a paper on his desk. "Here's his resignation. Better see the Secretary General at once."

Mr. Kiku took it. "I shall."

"I didn't want you there when I twisted his arm. It's harder for a man to say 'Uncle' with a witness. You understood?"

"Regrettable."

"Don't waste tears. Now I am going to write the speech he will make before the Council. After that I'll look up the boys he talked to last night and beg them, for the sake of their dear old home planet, to take the proper line on the follow-up story. They won't like it."

"I suppose not."

"But they'll go along. Us humans have got to stick together; we are badly outnumbered."

"So I have always felt. Thanks, Wes."

"A pleasure. Just one thing I didn't mention to him . . ."

"So?"

"I didn't remind him that the boy's name was John Thomas Stuart. I'm not sure the Martian Commonwealth would have bolted, in view of that one fact. The Council might have sustained Mac, after all — and we might have found out whether the Hroshian laddies can do what they say they can."

Kiku nodded. "I thought of that, too. It didn't seem the time to mention it."

"No. There are so many swell places for a man to keep his mouth shut. What are you smiling at?"

"I was thinking," Mr. Kiku explained, "that it is a good thing that the Hroshii do not read our newspapers."

XIV

Mrs. Stuart did read newspapers. Greenberg had had great trouble persuading her to go to Capital and to bring her son, because he was not free to tell her why. But he did persuade her and she had agreed to leave the following morning.

When Greenberg arrived to pick them up he found her in a white fury.

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She simply shoved the newspaper into his hand. He glanced at it. "Yes? I saw a copy at the hotel. Nonsense, of course."

"That's what I've been trying to tell mother," John Thomas said sullenly, "but she won't listen."

"John Thomas, you keep quiet. Well, Mr. Greenberg? What have you to say for yourself?"

Greenberg did not have a good answer. He had tried to call Mr. Kiku as soon as he saw the news story and had been told by Mildred that the boss and Mr. Robbins were with the Secretary and could not be disturbed. He told her that he would call later, realizing uneasily that trouble was not all at his end.

"Mrs. Stuart, surely you know that news reports are often distorted. There has been no talk of hostages and —"

"How can you say that when it says so right there! That's an interview with the Secretary of Space. Who knows more about it? You? Or the Secretary?"

Greenberg had his own opinion but did not dare express it. "Please, Mrs. Stuart. Newspaper stories should not be accepted at face value. I am simply asking you to come to Capital for a quiet talk with the Under Secretary."

"If the Under Secretary wants to see me, let him come here."

"Madame, he will, if necessary. You know that there is an interplanetary conference in progress?"

She answered smugly, "I make it a rule never to pay attention to politics."

He sighed. "Some of us must. Mr. Kiku is unable to come here today because of that conference. We had hoped that you, as a private citizen, would come to him."

"Mr. Greenberg, I reluctantly consented. Now I find that you have deceived me. How do I know but what this is a trick? A plot to turn my son over to those *monsters?*"

"Ma'am, on my honor as an officer of the Federation I assure you —"

"Spare yourself, Mr. Greenberg. Now, if you will excuse me . . ."

Greenberg looked around, intending to bring the boy into the argument, but John Thomas had quietly left.

Greenberg had his taxi driver drop him on the hotel roof in order to avoid reporters, but a man was waiting there, armed with an interview phone. "Half a mo', Mr. Commissioner. My name's Hovey. How about a few words on Secretary MacClure's announcement?"

"No comment."

"In other words you agree with it?"

"No comment."

"Then you disagree?"

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"No comment. I'm in a hurry."

"Just a second, please. Westville has a big local angle. I'd like to get a story before the main office sends heavyweights here to push me aside."

Greenberg relaxed a little — no sense in antagonizing the press and the fellow had a point; he knew how it felt to have someone senior sent to cope with a problem that had started as his. "Okay. But keep it brief; I really am in a hurry." He took out cigarettes. "Got a light on you?"

"Sure." They lighted up. Hovey continued, "People are saying that this blast of the Secretary's is just a smoke screen and that you have come here to get the Stuart boy and turn him over to the Hroshii people. How about it?"

"No com — No, don't say that; say this and quote me: No citizen of the Federation ever has been or ever will be surrendered as a hostage to any power whatsoever."

"That's official?"

"That's official," Greenberg said firmly.

"Then what are you doing here? I understand you are trying to take the Stuart kid and his mother back to Capital. Capital Enclave isn't legally part of the North American Union, is it? If you got him there, our local and national officials couldn't protect him."

Greenberg shook his head angrily. "Any citizen of the Federation is on his home grounds in the Enclave. He has all rights there that he has at home."

"Why do you want him there?"

Greenberg lied fast and fluently. "John Thomas Stuart has knowledge of the psychology of the Hroshii held by no other human being. We want his help in dealing with them."

"That's more like it. 'Westville Boy Recruited as Diplomatic Aide.' How's that for a lead?"

"Sounds good," Greenberg agreed. "Got enough? I'm in a rush."

"Sure," agreed Hovey. "I can pad this to a couple of thousand words. Thanks, Commissioner. See you later."

Greenberg went down and locked himself in, then turned to the phone, intending to call the department, but it came to life first. Chief Dreiser looked out at him. "Mr. Commissioner Greenberg —"

"How do you do, Chief?"

"Well enough, thank you. But Mr. Greenberg . . . I've just had a call from Mrs. Stuart."

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Stuart's son is missing. She thinks he might be with you."

"So? She's mistaken. I don't know where he is."

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"Is that true, Mr. Commissioner?"

"Chief, I do not tolerate being called a liar."

Dreiser went doggedly ahead. "Sorry. But I must add this. Mrs. Stuart does not want her son to leave town. The police department backs her up 100 per cent."

"Naturally."

"Don't mistake me, Mr. Commissioner. You are a very important official . . . but you are just another citizen if you get out of line."

"Chief, if you find that I am doing anything illegal, I urge you to do your duty."

"I shall, sir. I certainly shall."

Greenberg switched off, started again to call in, and thought better of it. If the boss had new instructions, he would send them — and Kiku despised field agents who chased back to mama whenever there was a slight shift in the wind. He must change Mrs. Stuart's mind — or hole up here for the winter.

While he was thinking, the phone again signalled; he found himself looking at Betty Sorenson. She smiled and said, "This is Miss Smith speaking."

"Umm . . . how do you do, Miss Smith."

"Well, thank you. But busy. I have a client, a Mr. Brown. He is being urged to take a trip. What he wants to know is this: He has a friend at the city of his destination; if he makes this trip, will he be allowed to see his friend?"

Greenberg thought rapidly. The other Hroshii would be around Lummox as thick as flies; it might be dangerous to let the boy go where they were and he was sure Mr. Kiku had not so intended.

Oh, the police could throw a tanglefoot field over the whole space port if necessary! The Hroshii weren't superhuman. "Tell Mr. Brown that he will see his friend."

"Thank you. Uh, Mr. Jones, where could your pilot pick us up?"

Greenberg hesitated. "It would be better for Mr. Brown to make the trip by the commercial lines. Just a moment." He found the flight schedule folder provided in most hotel rooms. "There is a ship leaving Stateport in about an hour. Could he catch it?"

"Oh, yes. But . . . well, there is a matter of money."

"Oh. Suppose I make you a personal loan? You, not Mr. Brown."

She broke into a grin. "That would be lovely!"

"Have you any suggestion as to how to get it to you?"

Betty did have — a snack shop called The Chocolate Bar across from Central High School. A few minutes later he was waiting in it, sipping a chocolate-and-milk mess. Betty showed up, he passed her an envelope and

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she left. He stayed there until he could no longer face the contents of his glass, then went back to the hotel.

He waited two hours, then called Mrs. Stuart. "I have just heard that your son left for Capital on his own."

He waited for her to quiet down, then added, "Mrs. Stuart, I'm still in Westville but am about to fly back to Capital. Would you care to come with me? My ship is faster than the commercial liners."

Half an hour later they left for Capital.

Mr. Kiku saw John Thomas Stuart first. Old enough to be John Thomas's grandfather, he treated John Thomas as an equal, thanking him for coming, offering refreshment. He explained briefly that Lummox was unwilling to return home unless John Thomas went along. "It is extremely important to the Hroshii that Lummox return. To us it is important for other reasons."

"You mean," John Thomas said bluntly, "that they are going to fight us if I don't? That's what the papers say."

Mr. Kiku hesitated briefly. "They may. But that is not the reason I have consulted you. I doubt if the Hroshii would attempt anything if your friend Lummox opposed it . . . which I think Lummox would if it was something dangerous to you, such as an attack on this planet."

John Thomas shook his head in wonder. "Seems funny. The way I used to boss him around."

"In any case I am not asking you to save us from a possible war. I am thinking of positive benefits; we want to establish friendly relations with these people. I asked you here to find out your own wishes. If I make it possible for you to go with Lummox to their planet — Hroshijud it is called — what would your answer be? Think it over, you need not answer now."

John Thomas gulped. "I don't need to think it over. I'd go, of course."

"Don't be hasty."

"I'm not being hasty. Lummie will need me. He's never happy with strangers. Anyhow, he wants me to. You don't think I'd let him down, do you?"

"No. But this is a serious decision. You'll be going almost a thousand light-years from home."

John Thomas shrugged. "My great-grandfather went there. Why shouldn't I?"

"Mmm . . . yes. I keep forgetting your ancestry. But aren't you interested in knowing what other human beings are going with you? Or even if there are to be any?"

"Huh?" John Thomas thought about it. "Oh, those details will work themselves out. It's not my business."

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"They will be worked out," Mr. Kiku answered. He stood up. "Thank you for coming."

"Not at all, sir. Uh . . . when do I get to see Lummox?"

Mr. Kiku pursed his lips. "Not right away; I have matters to settle first. In the meantime, enjoy yourself. I'm assigning a man to guide you around and pay your expenses. He will act as bodyguard, too."

"A bodyguard? What for? I'm grown up."

"So you are. But, if for no other reason, I don't want you talking to reporters. Do you mind? I have no authority to tell you not to."

"Oh no, Mr. Kiku — if it will help."

"It will help."

Mr. Kiku had received John Thomas at his desk. Mrs. Stuart he received in a lavish room, without a conference table, which had been designed by subtle psychologists to impress visitors. Mr. Kiku knew that he was in for a bad time.

He fended her off with tea and formality, forced the talk to trivia. "So good of you to come, madame. Sugar? Lemon?"

"Uh, neither, thank you. Mr. Kiku, I must make clear first off that —"

"Try these little puffs. Did Mr. Greenberg make you comfortable?"

"What? Oh, yes, a nice suite, overlooking the Gardens of Heaven. But Mr. Kiku —"

"I was sorry to ask you to come to me. But I am the prisoner of my job. "I can't leave Capital at certain times."

"That's understandable, I suppose. Now —"

"Your kindness is appreciated. You must remain, as an official guest, as long as you see fit. Capital is worth seeing, even if one has seen it often — which no doubt you have. I understand that the shopping is excellent, too."

"Well, as a matter of fact I haven't seen it before. Some of the shops do look intriguing."

"Then enjoy it, dear lady. No reason not to mix pleasure with business. Which brings us to business, I suppose. I have been talking with your son."

"Mr. Kiku —"

"Indulge me, I will be brief. We are sending an extensive cultural and scientific mission to the home planet of the Hroshii. I want to send your son as a special aide. He has agreed to go." He waited for the explosion.

"Utterly unthinkable! Out of the question!"

"Why, Mrs. Stuart?"

"Mr. Kiku, what sort of inhuman beast are you? I know what you mean — you plan to turn my son, my only son, over to those monstrosities as a hostage. Unspeakable!"

He shook his head. "Ma'am, you have been misled by a wild newspaper

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story. Have you seen the later story? The Secretary's speech before the Council?"

"No, but —"

"I will supply a copy. It explains how that nonsense got into print. It also affirms the ancient policy of the Federation, 'All for One' — against the Galaxy if necessary. In this case your son is that 'one'; he has many planets behind him. But no such issue arises; your son will join a peaceful mission to a friendly people. He will help build a cultural bridge between two civilized but very different races."

"Hmmph! The paper said that these Hróshii demanded that you turn my son over to them. Explain *that* if you can!"

"Difficulties of translation. They asked for your son by name, but on behalf of that Hroshia which was for years part of your own household, Lummox. This friendship between these two, transcending form and kind and source and mind, is one of the greatest fortunes which has happened to our race since our people first discovered that we were not sole heirs of the Almighty. This unlikely circumstance will let us bridge in one leap a chasm of misunderstanding ordinarily spanned by years of trial and tragic error." He paused. "One is tempted to think of them as children of destiny."

Mrs. Stuart snorted. " 'Destiny'! Fiddlesticks! My son is *not* going to the other side of nowhere. In another week he is entering college, which is where he belongs."

"Is it his education which worries you, ma'am?"

"What? Why, of course."

"I can put your mind at rest. In addition to an embassy, we will send a cultural mission, a scientific mission, an economics and trade mission, and many specialists, all topflight minds. No single college could hire such an aggregation of talent; even the largest institutions of learning would be hard put to match it. Your son will be taught, not casually but systematically. If he earns a degree, it will be awarded by, uh — by the Institute of Outer Sciences." He smiled. "Does that suit you?"

"Why, I never heard of such a silly arrangement. Anyway, the Institute isn't a college."

"It can bestow a degree. Or, if not, we will have its charter amended. But degrees are unimportant, ma'am, the point is that your son will have an unparalleled higher education. I understand that he wishes to study xenic science. Well, not only will his teachers be the finest possible, but also he will live in a new field laboratory of xenology and take part in the research. We know little of the Hroshii; he will labor on the frontiers of science."

"He's *not* going to study xenology."

"Eh? He told Mr. Greenberg that he meant to."

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"Oh, he has that silly idea but I have no intention of indulging him. He will study some sound profession — the law, probably."

Mr. Kiku's brows went up. "Please, Mrs. Stuart," he said plaintively. "Not that. I am a lawyer — he might wind up where I am."

She looked at him sharply. He went on, "Will you tell me why you plan to thwart him?"

"I see no reason why I should. Mr. Kiku, this discussion is useless."

"I hope not, ma'am. May I tell a story?" He assumed consent and went on. "More than a hundred years ago a young Hroshia encountered a friendly stranger, went off with him. You know our half of that story. Let me tell you their side, as I have learned it with the help of an interpreter and our xenologists. This little Hroshia was important to them; they wanted her back very badly. Their patterns are not ours; they interweave six distinct sorts in a genetic scheme we will be a long time understanding.

"This little Hroshia had a role to play, a part planned more than two thousand years ago, around the time of Christ. And her part was a necessary link in a larger planning, a shaping of the race that has been going on, I am told, for thirty-eight thousand of our years. Can you grasp that, Mrs. Stuart? I find it difficult. But perhaps my trouble lies in the fact that we ourselves are the shortest-lived intelligent race we have yet found.

"What would we do if a child was missing for more than a century? No need to discuss it; it in no way resembles what the Hroshii did. They were not too worried about her welfare; they did not think of her as dead . . . but merely misplaced. They do not die easily. They do not even starve to death. Uh, perhaps you have heard of flatworms? *Euplanaria?*"

"I have never taken any interest in xenobiology, Mr. Kiku."

"I made the same error, ma'am; I asked, 'What planet is it from?' Euplanaria are relatives of ours; there are many more flatworms on Earth than there are men. But they have a characteristic in common with Hroshii; both breeds grow when fed, shrink when starved — and seem to be immortal, barring accidents. I had wondered why Lummox was so much larger than the other Hroshii. No mystery — you fed Lummox too much."

"I *told* John Thomas that repeatedly!"

"No harm done. They are already shrinking her down. The Hroshii were not angry, it seems, over the theft or kidnaping or luring away of their youngster. They knew her — a lively, adventuresome disposition was part of what had been bred into her. But they did want her back and they searched for her year after year, following the single clew that she must have gone off with a certain group of visitors from space; they knew what those visitors looked like but not from what part of the sky they came.

"It would have discouraged us — but not them. I have a misty impression

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that the century they spent chasing rumors, asking questions, and checking strange planets was — *to them* — about what a few months would be to us. In time they found her. Again, they were neither grateful nor angry; we simply did not count.

"That might have been our only contact with the noble Hroshii had not a hitch developed; the Hroshia, now grown big but still young, refused to leave without her monstrous friend — I speak from the Hroshian viewpoint. This was terrible to them, but they had no way to force her. How bitter a disappointment it was I ask you to imagine — a mating planned when Caesar fought the Gauls all now in readiness, with the other strains matured and ready — and Lummox refuses to go home. She shows no interest in her destiny — remember, she is very young; our own children do not develop social responsibility very early. In any case she won't budge without John Thomas Stuart." He spread his hands. "You see their predicament?"

Mrs. Stuart set her mouth. "I'm sorry but it is no business of mine."

"True. I suppose that the simplest thing to do is to let Lummox go home — to your home, I mean — and —"

"What? Oh, no!"

"Ma'am?"

"You can't send that beast back to me! I won't stand for it."

Mr. Kiku stroked his chin. "I don't understand you, ma'am. It's Lummox's home; it has been the Hroshia's home much longer than it has been yours, about five times as long I believe. If I remember correctly, it isn't your property, but your son's. Am I right?"

"That has nothing to do with it! You *can't* load me down with that beast."

"A court might decide that it was up to your son. But why cross that bridge? I am trying to find out why you oppose something so clearly to your son's advantage."

"Mr. Kiku, I lost my husband to space; I won't let my son go the same way. I intend to see to it that he stays and lives on Earth."

He shook his head sadly. "Mrs. Stuart, sons are lost from the beginning."

She took out a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. "I can't let him go off into the sky — he's only a little boy!"

"I call my assistants 'boys' because I am an old man. You think of your son as a boy because you are, by comparison, an old woman. Forgive me. But the notion that a boy becomes a man only on a certain birthday is a mere legal fiction. Your son is a man; you have no moral right over him."

"What a wicked thing to say! It's not true; I am merely trying to help him and guide him."

Mr. Kiku smiled grimly. "Madam, the commonest weakness of our race

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is our ability to rationalize our most selfish purposes. I repeat, you have no right to force him into your mold."

"I won't let him! He's still a minor . . . I have rights."

"Limited rights, ma'am. He could divorce you."

She gasped. "He wouldn't do that to me! His own mother!"

"Perhaps. Our children's courts have long taken a dim view of the arbitrary use of parental authority; coercion in choice of career is usually open-and-shut. Mrs. Stuart, it is best to give into the inevitable gracefully. Don't oppose him too far, or you will lose him completely. He is going."

XV

Mr. Kiku returned to his office with his stomach jumping but he did not stop to cater to it. Instead he leaned across his desk and said, "Sergei. Come in now."

Greenberg entered and laid down two spools of sound tape. "I'm glad to get rid of these. Whoo!"

"Wipe them, please. Then forget you ever heard them."

"Delighted." Greenberg dipped them in a cavity. "Cripes, boss, couldn't you have given him an anesthetic?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Wes Robbins was pretty rough on him. I felt like a window peeper. Why did you want me to hear them? I don't have to deal with the mess. Or do I?"

"No. But someday you will need to know how it is done."

"Mmmm . . . Boss — did you have any intention of letting it stick when he fired you?"

"Don't ask silly questions."

"Sorry. How did you make out with the hard case?"

"She won't let him go."

"So?"

"So he is going."

"She'll scream her head off to the papers."

"So she will." Mr. Kiku leaned toward his desk. "Wes?"

"Mr. Robbins is at the funeral of the Venerian foreign minister," a female voice answered, "with the Secretary."

"Oh, yes. Ask him to see me when he returns, please."

"Yes, Mr. Kiku."

"Thank you, Shizuko." The Under Secretary turned to Greenberg. "Sergei, your acting appointment as diplomatic officer first class was made permanent when you were assigned to this affair."

"Was it?"

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"Yes. The papers will no doubt reach you. You are now being promoted to chief diplomatic officer, acting. I will hold up the permanent appointment for ninety days to let some noses get back in joint."

Greenberg's face showed no expression. "Nice," he said. "But why?"

"You are going to Hroshijud as deputy and chief of mission. Mr. MacClure will be ambassador, but I doubt that he will learn the tongue — which will of course place the burden of dealing with them on you. So you must acquire a working knowledge of their language at once. Follow me?"

"Yes," he answered thoughtfully, "but how about Dr. Ftaeml? The Ambassador will probably use him as interpreter rather than myself." To himself he added: boss, you can't do this to me. MacClure can short me out through Ftaeml — and there I am, nine hundred light-years from help.

"Sorry," Kiku answered, "but I can't spare Ftaeml. I shall retain him to interpret for the Hroshij mission they will leave behind. He accepted the job."

Greenberg frowned. "I'll start picking his brain in earnest, then. I've soaked up some Hroshija already — makes your throat raw. But when did they agree to all this?"

"They haven't agreed. They will."

"I admire your confidence, boss. They strike me as being as stubborn as Mrs. Stuart. Speaking of such, Ftaeml says they are getting insistent about the Stuart kid. Now that you know he's going shouldn't we quiet them down? Ftaeml is jittery. He says the only thing that restrains them from giving us the works is that it would displease our old pal Lummox."

"No," answered Kiku, "we do not tell them. Nor do we tell Ftaeml. I want him to remain apprehensive."

Greenberg chewed a knuckle. "Boss," he said slowly, "isn't that asking for trouble? Far be it from me to quote you-know-who — but if the risk is that great, aren't the people entitled to know?"

"Yes. But we can't tell them."

"How's that again?"

Mr. Kiku frowned. "Sergei," he said slowly, "this society has been in crisis ever since the first rocket reached our Moon. For three centuries scientists and engineers and explorers have repeatedly broken through to new areas, new dangers, new situations; each time the political managers have had to scramble to hold things together, like a juggler with too much in the air. It's unavoidable.

"But we have managed to keep a jury-rigged republican form of government and to maintain democratic customs. We can be proud of that. But it is not now a real democracy and it can't be. I conceive it to be our duty to hold this society together while it adjusts to a strange and terrifying

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world. It would be pleasant to discuss each problem, take a vote, then repeal it later if the collective judgment proved faulty. But it's rarely that easy. We find ourselves oftener like pilots of a ship in a life-and-death emergency. Is it the pilot's duty to hold powwows with passengers? Or is it his job to try to bring them home safely?"

"You make it sound convincing, boss. I wonder if you are right?"

"I wonder also." Mr. Kiku went on, "I had intended to hold the conference with the Hroshii tomorrow morning."

"Okay. I'll tell Ftaeml. They ought to stay quiet overnight."

"But, since they are anxious, we will postpone until the following day and let them grow still more anxious." Kiku thought. "Have Ftaeml tell them this: Our customs require that a party wishing to negotiate send presents ahead; therefore they must send us presents. Tell them that the lavishness of the gifts gauge the seriousness of the matter to be discussed; too poor a gift will prejudice their petition."

Greenberg frowned. "You have some swindle in mind, but I miss the point. Ftaeml knows that our customs don't call for it."

"Then phrase it so that it is not a lie. Tell him that it is a very old custom — which is true — and that we resort to it only on sufficiently important occasions — which this is. Give him an out, let him see your purpose, gain a sympathetic translation."

"Can do. But why, boss? Just for bulge?"

"Precisely. We are negotiating from weakness; it is imperative that we start with the upper hand. I have hopes that the symbolism of the petitioner bearing presents is as universal as we have found it to be up to now."

"Suppose they won't kick through with the loot?"

"Then we sit tight until they change their minds." Kiku added, "Start selecting your team. Let me see a list tomorrow."

Greenberg groaned. "And I was going to turn in early."

"Never count on it in this business. Oh yes — as soon as the conference is over, send a good man — Peters, perhaps — up to their ship to see what changes are needed for human passengers."

"Wait a minute, boss. I prefer one of our own ships. How do you know they've got room for us?"

"Our ships will follow. But the Hroshia Lummox goes with them and young Stuart goes with Lummox, therefore our mission goes in their ship in order that the boy will be accompanied by humans."

"I see. Sorry."

"There will be room. They will leave their own mission behind at this same time — or no one will go. One hundred Hroshii, to pluck a figure, will certainly vacate living space for one hundred off our sort."

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"In other words, boss," Greenberg said softly, "you are insisting on hostages."

" 'Hostage,' " Mr. Kiku said primly, "is a word that no diplomat should ever use."

The ground floor auditorium of the Spatial Affairs building was selected for the conference because its doors were large enough and its floors strong enough. It might have been safer to hold it at the space port, as Dr. Ftaeml urged, but Mr. Kiku insisted on the Hroshii coming to him for reasons of protocol.

Their presents preceded them.

The gifts were stacked on both sides of the great hall and were lavish in quantity; their values and qualities were still unknown. The departmental xenologists were as eager as a child faced with birthday presents, but Mr. Kiku had ordered them to hold off until the conference was over.

Sergei Greenberg joined Mr. Kiku in the retiring room behind the rostrum as the Hroshii delegation entered the hall. He looked worried. "I don't like this, boss."

Kiku looked up. "Why not?"

Greenberg glanced at the others present — Mr. MacClure and a double for the Secretary General. The double, a skilled actor, nodded and went back to studying the speech he was about to deliver, but MacClure said sharply, "What's the trouble, Greenberg? Those devils up to something?"

"I hope not." Greenberg addressed Kiku, "I checked arrangements from the air and they look good. We've got the Boulevard of the Suns barricaded from here to the port and enough reserves on each side for a small war. Then I picked up the head of their column as it left the port and flew above it. They dropped off reserves of their own about every quarter of a mile and set up gear of some sort at each strong point. It might just be communication links back to their ship. I doubt it."

"So do I," agreed Mr. Kiku.

The Secretary said worriedly, "Now look here, Mr. Kiku —"

"If you please, Mr. MacClure. Sergei, the Chief of Staff reported this earlier. I advised the Secretary General that we should make no move unless they try to pass our barricades."

"We could lose a lot of men."

"So we could. But what will *you* do, Sergei, when you are required to enter a stranger's camp to palaver? Trust him completely? Or try to cover your retreat?"

"Mmm . . . yes."

"I consider this the most hopeful sign we have had yet. If those are weap-

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ons, as I hope they are, it means that they do not regard us as negligible opponents. One does not set up artillery against mice." He looked around. "Shall we go? I think we have let them stew long enough. Ready, Arthur?"

"Sure." The Secretary-General's double chucked his script aside. "That boy Robbins knows how to write a speech. He doesn't load up a sentence with sibilants and make me spray the first five rows."

"Good." They went in, the actor first, then the Secretary, then the Permanent Under Secretary followed by his assistant.

Of the long procession of Hroshii that had left the space port only a dozen had entered the auditorium, but even that number made the hall seem filled. Mr. Kiku looked down at them with interest, it being the first time that he had laid eyes on a Hroshiu. It was true, he saw, that these people did not present the golliwog friendliness shown in the pictures of the Hroshia Lummox. These were adults, even though smaller than Lummox. The one just in front of the platform and flanked by two others was staring back at him. The stare was cold and confident. Mr. Kiku found that the creature's gaze made him uneasy; he wanted to shift his eyes. Instead he stared back and reminded himself that his own hypnotherapist could do it as well as the Hroshiu or better.

Greenberg touched his elbow. "They've set up weapons in here, too," he whispered. "See that? In the back?"

Mr. Kiku answered, "We are not supposed to know that it is a weapon. Assume that it is apparatus for their own record of the conference." Dr. Ftaeml was standing beside the foremost Hroshiu; the Under Secretary said to him, "Tell them what our Secretary General is. Describe him as chief of seventeen powerful planets."

The Rargyllian hesitated. "What about the President of your Council?"

"The Secretary General embodies both of them for this occasion."

"Very well, my friend." The Rargyllian spoke in high-pitched speech which reminded Kiku of puppies whining. The Hroshiu answered him briefly in the same tongue, and suddenly Mr. Kiku no longer felt the dread that had been inspired by the creature's stare. It was not possible to feel awe for a person who sounded like a lonesome puppy. But he reminded himself that deadly orders could be given in any speech.

Ftaeml was speaking. "Here beside me is —" he broke into a multiple squeal of the strange tongue "— who is commander of the ship and the expedition. She — no, perhaps 'he' would be better — he is hereditary marshal and —" The Rargyllian broke off and fretted. "You have no equivalent rank. Perhaps I should say 'mayor of the palace.' "

Greenberg suddenly said, "How about 'boss,' Doc?"

"A happy suggestion! Yes, this is the Boss. Her . . . his social position is

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not highest but his practical authority is almost without limit."

Kiku asked, "Is his authority such that he may conduct plenipotentiary bargaining?"

"Ah, yes, certainly!"

"Then we will get on with it." He turned to the actor and nodded. Then he spoke to the desk in front of him, using a hush circuit: "Getting all this?"

A voice answered his ears alone. "Yes, sir. The picture pick-up faded once but it's all right now."

"Are the Secretary General and the Chief of Staff listening?"

"I believe so, sir. Their offices are monitoring."

"Very well." Mr. Kiku listened to the Secretary General's speech. It was short but delivered with great dignity and the actor paced it so that Ftaeml might translate. The Secretary General welcomed the Hroshii to Earth, assured them that the peoples of the Federation were happy that the Hroshii had at long last found their lost scion, and added that this happy accident should be the occasion for the Hroshii to take their rightful place in the Community of Civilizations.

He sat down and promptly went to sleep for all practical purposes, eyes open and face fixed in kindly dignity. The double could hold this Roman-Emperor pose for hours without really noticing whatever he might be chaperoning.

Mr. MacClure spoke briefly, seconding the Secretary General and adding that the Federation was now prepared to discuss any matters of business between the Federation and the noble Hroshii.

Greenberg leaned to Kiku and whispered, "Should we clap, boss? Somebody ought to and I don't think they know how."

"Shut up," Kiku said amiably. "Dr. Ftaeml, does the commander have a speech of formality to deliver?"

"I think not." Ftaeml spoke to the leading Hroshiu, then answered, "The reply is a serious comment on the two speeches made, rather than an answer of formality. He states that the Hroshii have no need of other . . . lesser . . . breeds and says we should now get to business without further, ah . . . trivia."

"If it is true that they have no need for other peoples, please ask him why they have come to us and why they have offered us presents?"

"But you insisted on it, my friend," Ftaeml answered in surprise.

"Thank you, Doctor, but I do not want your comment. Require him to answer. Please do not coach him."

"I will try." Ftaeml exchanged several sentences of the high whining with the Hroshij commander, then turned back to Kiku. "Forgive me. He says

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that he acceded to your childishness as the simplest means of accomplishing his purpose. He wishes to discuss now the surrender of John Thomas Stuart."

"Please tell him that the matter is not open to discussion. The agenda requires that we first settle the question of diplomatic relations."

"Pardon me, sir. 'Diplomatic relations' is a concept difficult to translate. I have been working on it for some days."

"Tell him that what he sees now is an example of diplomatic relations. Free peoples, negotiating as equals, with peaceful intentions, to their mutual benefit."

The Rargyllian simulated a sigh. "Each of those concepts is almost equally difficult. I will try."

Presently he answered, "The hereditary marshal says that if what we are doing constitutes diplomatic relations you have them now. Where is the Stuart boy?"

"Not so fast. The agenda must be taken up point by point. They must accept an embassy and a mixed mission for cultural, scientific, and trade purposes. They must leave with us a similar embassy and mission. Regular travel between our two sovereignties must be planned. Not until these are disposed of can there be any mention of the Stuart boy."

"I will try again." Ftaeml spoke to the "Boss" Hroshiu at length; the reply was short. "He tells me to tell you that all those points are rejected as not worthy of consideration. Where is the Stuart boy?"

"In that case," Mr. Kiku answered quietly, "tell them that we do not bargain with barbarians. Tell them to pick up the trash — be sure of forceful translation! — with which they have littered our home, and get quickly back to their ship. They are required to take off at once. They must bundle their precious Hroshia aboard, by force if need be, if they ever expect to see her again — for they will never again be allowed to land."

Ftaeml looked as if he were about to burst into tears he was incapable of shedding. "Please! I beg you not to antagonize them. I tell tales out of school — I go beyond my professional duties — but they could now destroy this city without recourse to their ship."

"Deliver the message. The conference is ended." Mr. Kiku stood up, picked up the others with his eyes, and headed for the retiring room.

The double went ahead. MacClure caught Kiku by the arm and fell into step. "Henry — you're running this, granted. But shouldn't you talk it over? They're savage beasts. It could —"

"Mr. MacClure," Kiku said softly, "as a distinguished predecessor once said, in dealing with certain types you must step on their toes until *they* apologize." He urged the Secretary toward the door.

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"But suppose they won't?"

"That is the hazard. Please — let us not argue in their presence." They went into the retiring room; the door closed behind them.

Greenberg turned to Kiku. "Nice try, boss — but what do we do now?"

"We wait."

"Okay." Greenberg went nervously to a wall relay, picked up the scene inside the auditorium. The Hroshii had not left. He could just make out Ftaeml, surrounded by creatures much larger than the medusoid.

The double said to Kiku, "Through with me, sir?"

"Yes, Arthur. A good job."

"Thanks. I've got time to get this make-up off and catch the second game of the double-header."

"Good. Perhaps you had better change your appearance here."

"Shucks, the photographers all know. They play along."

He left, whistling. MacClure sat down, lit a cigar, took a puff, put it down. "Henry, you ought to notify the Chief of Staff."

"He knows. We wait."

They waited. Greenberg said suddenly, "Here comes Ftaeml." He hurried to the door and let the Rargyllian in.

Dr. Ftaeml seemed very tense. "My dear Mr. Kiku — the Hroshij commander states that they will agree to your strange wishes for sake of prompt settlement. He insists that you now deliver the Stuart boy."

"Please tell him that he misunderstands entirely the nature of friendly relations between civilized people. We do not barter the freedom of one of our citizens against their worthless favors, even as they would not barter the freedom of their Hroshia Lummox. Then tell him that I order them to leave at once."

Ftaeml said earnestly, "I reluctantly deliver your message."

He was back quickly. "They agree to your terms."

"Good. Come, Sergei. Mr. MacClure, there is no need for you to appear unless it suits you."

The Hroshij "boss," it seemed to Kiku, was more baleful than ever. But the details went promptly forward — an equal number of Hroshii and of humans to constitute the missions, passage to be provided in the Hroshij ship, one of the Hroshii there present to be ambassador to the Federation. Ftaeml assured them that this Hroshiu was of practical rank second only to the expedition commander.

And now, said the Hroshij commander, it is time to turn over to us John Thomas Stuart. Ftaeml added anxiously, "I trust you have made arrangements, my friend? I dislike the tenor of this. It has been too easy."

With a feeling of satisfaction soothing his troubled stomach Mr. Kiku

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answered, "I see no difficulty. The Stuart boy is willing to go, now that we are assured of civilized relations. Please make sure that they understand that he goes as a free being, not a slave, not a pet. The Hroshii must guarantee his status and his return passage, in one of their own ships, whenever he so wishes."

Ftaeml translated. Presently he answered, "All of that is satisfactory except for something which I will translate as a 'minor detail.' The Stuart boy will be a member of the household of the Hroshia Lummox. Naturally — I translate here most carefully — naturally the question of the boy returning, if ever, is a personal prerogative of the Hroshia Lummox. Should she grow tired of him and wish to return him, a ship would be made available."

"No."

"No what, sir?"

"A simple negative. The subject of the Stuart boy is finished."

Ftaeml turned back to his clients.

"They say," he answered presently, "that there is no treaty."

"I know that. Treaties are not signed with — they have a word meaning 'servant'?"

"They have servants of several sorts, some higher, some lower."

"Use the word for the lowest sort. Tell them that there is no treaty because servants have no power to treat. Tell them to go and be quick about it."

Ftaeml looked at Kiku sadly. "I admire you, my friend, but I do not envy you." He turned to the expedition commander and whined for several moments.

The Hroshiu opened his mouth wide, looked at Kiku, and squealed like a kicked puppy. Ftaeml gave a start and moved away. "Very bad profanity, untranslatable —" The monster continued to make noises; Ftaeml tried frantically to translate: "Contempt . . . lower animal . . . eat you with relish . . . follow back your ancestors and eat them as well . . . your despicable race must be taught manners . . . kidnapers . . . child stealers . . ." He stopped in great agitation.

The Hroshiu lumbered toward the platform, reared up until he was eye to eye with Mr. Kiku. Greenberg slid a hand under his desk and located a control that would throw a tanglefoot field over the lower floor — a permanent installation; the hall had seen other disturbances.

But Mr. Kiku sat like stone. They eyed each other, the massive thing from 'Out There' and the little elderly human. Nothing moved in the great hall, nothing was said.

Then from the back of the hall broke out a whining as if a whole basket

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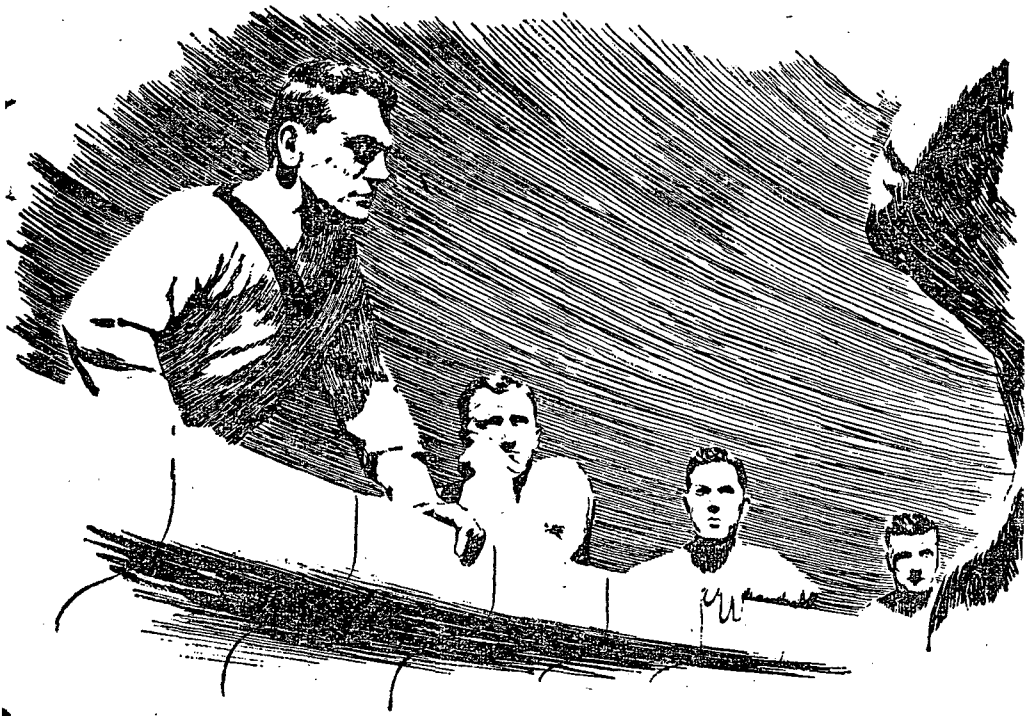

The Hroshiu lumbered toward the platform, reared up until he was eye to eye with Mr. Kiku.

of puppies had been disturbed at once. The Hroshij commander whirled around, making the floor shake, and shrilled to his retainers. He was answered and he whined back sharp command. All twelve Hroshii swarmed out the door with speed incredible for beings so ungainly.

Kiku stood up and watched them. Greenberg grabbed his arm. "Boss! The Chief of Staff is trying to reach you."

Kiku shook him off. "Tell him not to be hasty. It is most important that he not be hasty. Is our car waiting?"

XVI

John Thomas Stuart XI had wanted to attend the conference; it required a flat refusal to keep him away. He was in the Hotel Universal in the suite provided for him and his mother, playing checkers with his bodyguard,

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when Betty Sorenson showed up with Miss Holtz. Myra Holtz was an operative for BuSec of DepSpace, and concealed her policewoman profession under a pleasant façade. Mr. Kiku's instructions to her concerning Betty had been: "Keep a sharp eye on her. She has a taste for excitement."

The two guards greeted each other; Betty said, "Hi, Johnnie. Why aren't you over at the heap big smoke?"

"They wouldn't let me."

"Me, too." She glanced around. "Where's the Duchess?"

"Gone shopping. I'm still getting the silent treatment. Seventeen hats she's bought. What have you done to your face?"

Betty turned to a mirror. "Like it? It's called 'Cosmic Contouring' and it's the latest thing."

"Makes you look like a zebra with the pip."

"Why, you country oaf. Ed, you like it. Don't you?"

Ed Cowen looked up from the checker board and said hastily, "I wouldn't know. My wife says I have no taste."

"Most men haven't. Johnnie, Myra and I have come to invite you two to go out on the town. How about it?"

"Well . . . I'm supposed to keep in touch with the office. They might want you any time now."

"Pooh!" put in Betty. "You carry a bodyphone. Anyhow Myra does."

Cowen shook his head. "Let's play it safe."

"Am I under arrest?" Betty persisted. "Is Johnnie?"

"Mmm . . . no. It's more protective custody."

"Then you can protectively cuss him wherever he is. Or stay here and play checkers with yourself. Come on, Johnnie."

Cowen looked at Miss Holtz; she answered slowly, "I suppose it's all right, Ed. We'll be with them."

Cowen shrugged and stood up. Johnnie said to Betty, "I'm not going out in public with you looking like that. Wash your face."

"But Johnnie! It took two hours to put it on."

"Wash your face. Or we go nowhere. Don't you agree, Miss Holtz?"

Special Operative Holtz had only a flower pattern adorning her left cheek, aside from the usual tinting. She said thoughtfully, "Betty doesn't need it. Not at her age."

"Oh, you're a couple of Puritans!" Betty said bitterly, and slouched into the bath. She came out with her face glowing pink. "Now I'm stark naked. Let's go."

There was another tussle at the lift, which Ed Cowen won. They went to the roof to take an air taxi for sight-seeing, instead of going down to the streets. "Both you kids have had your faces spread around the papers the

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past few days. And this town has more crackpots than a second-hand shop. I don't want any incidents."

"Where to, Chief?" asked the hacker.

"Oh," said Cowen, "cruise around and show us sights. Put it on the hourly rate."

"Look," put in Johnnie, "take us to the space port."

"No," Cowen corrected. "Not out there."

"Why not, Ed? I haven't seen Lummox yet. I want to look at him. He may not be well."

"That's one thing you can't do," Cowen told him. "The Hroshii ship is out of bounds."

"Never mind him," Betty advised. "We'll get another taxi. I've got money, Johnnie. So long, Ed."

"Look," complained the driver. "I'll take you to Timbuctu. But I can't hang around over a landing flat. The cops get rude about it."

"Head for the space port," Cowen said resignedly.

There was a barricade around the many acres assigned to the Hroshii except where it had been broken to let their delegation enter the Boulevard of Suns, and even there the barricade joined others carrying on down the avenue toward the administrative group. Inside the enclosure the landing craft of the Hroshii sat squat and ugly, almost as large as a terrestrial star ship. Johnnie looked at it and wondered what it was going to be like to be on Hroshijud. He was uncomfortable at the thought, not because he was fea[illegible] but because he had not yet told Betty that he was going. He had started to a couple of times but it had not worked out right.

There were other sightseers in the air, and a crowd, not very thick, outside the barricade. No single wonder lasted long in Capital.

The Hroshii swarmed around the base of their ship, doing unexplained things with artifacts they had erected. Johnnie tried to estimate their number, found it like guessing beans in a bottle. Dozens, surely . . . how many more?

Suddenly he called out, "Hey! There's Lummie!"

Betty craned her neck. "Where, Johnnie?"

"Coming into sight on the far side of their ship. There!" He turned to the driver. "Say, mister, could you put us around on the far side as close in as they'll let you?"

The driver glanced at Cowen, who nodded. They swung around the police sentries and came in toward the Hroshij craft from the far side. Lummox could be seen clearly now, closely attended by a group of Hroshii and towering over them.

"I wish I had binox," Johnnie complained. "I can't really *see*."

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"Pair in the glove compartment," offered the driver.

Johnnie got them out and stared into his friend's face.

"Well —" John Thomas lowered the window and tried to get a better look. "Say, can't you take it in closer? And lower maybe? I want to give him a good checking over."

Cowen shook his head. The driver grumbled, "I don't want no words with the cops." But he did move in a little closer until he was lined up with the police cars.

Almost at once the speaker in the car's overhead blared, "Hey, you! Number four eighty-four! Where do you think you're going with that can? Drag it out of there!"

The driver muttered and started to obey. John Thomas, still with the glasses to his eyes, said, "Aw!" — then added, "I wonder if he can hear me? Lummie!" he shouted into the wind. "Oh Lummox!"

The Hroshia raised her head and looked wildly around.

Cowen grabbed John Thomas and reached for the window closure. But Johnnie shook free. "Oh, you go fry eggs!" he said angrily. "I've been pushed around long enough. *Lummox!* It's Johnnie, boy! Over here! Come over this way —"

Cowen dragged him inside and slammed the window shut. "I knew we shouldn't have come out. Driver, let's get out of here."

It needed no binoculars to see what was happening. Lummox headed straight for the barrier, on a beeline with the taxi, scattering other Hroshii right and left. On reaching the barrier no attempt was made to flow over it; Lummox went through it.

"Jumping jeepers!" Cowen said softly. "But the tanglefoot will stop her."

It did not. Lummox slowed down, but one mighty foot followed another, as if the charged air had been deep mud. With the persistence of a glacier the Hroshia was seeking the point most closely under the taxi.

And more Hroshii were pouring out the gap. They made still heavier weather of the immobilizing field, but still they came. As Cowen watched, Lummox broke free of the zone and came on at a gallop, with people scattering ahead of her.

Cowen snapped, "Myra, get through on another circuit to the military! I'll call the office."

Betty grabbed his sleeve. "No!"

"Huh? You again! Shut up or you'll get the back of my hand."

"Mr. Cowen, will you *listen.*" She went on hastily, "It's no good calling for help. There isn't anybody who can make Lummox listen but Johnnie — and *they* won't listen to anybody but Lummox. You *know* that. So put him

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down where he can talk to Lummie — or you're going to have a lot of people hurt and it will be all your fault."

Security Operative First Class Edwin Cowen stared at her and reviewed in his mind his past career and future hopes. Then he made a brave decision almost instantly. "Take her down," he snapped. "Land her and let the kid and me out."

The driver groaned. "I'm charging extra for this." But he landed the car so fast that it jarred them. Cowen snatched the door open and he and John Thomas burst out; Myra Holtz tried to grab Betty, was unsuccessful. She herself jumped out as the driver was already raising.

"Johnnie!" squealed Lummox and held out mighty arms in a universal gesture of welcome.

John Thomas ran to the star beast. "Lummie! Are you all right?"

"Sure," agreed Lummox. "Why not? Hi, Betty."

"Hi, Lummie."

"Hungry, though," Lummox added thoughtfully.

"We'll change that."

"It's all right. I'm not supposed to eat now."

John Thomas started to answer this amazing statement when he noticed Miss Holtz ducking away from one of the Hroshii. Others were milling around as if uncertain how to treat this development. When Johnnie saw Ed Cowen draw his gun and place himself between the Hroshiu and Myra he said suddenly, "Lummox! These are my friends. Tell your friends to leave them alone and get back inside. Quickly!"

"Whatever you say, Johnnie." The Hroshia spoke in the whining speech to her kin; at once she was obeyed.

"And make us a saddle. We'll go with you and have a long talk."

"Sure, Johnnie."

They got aboard, Johnnie giving Betty a hand up, and started in through the break in the barrier. When Lummox struck the tanglefoot field again they stopped and Lummox spoke sharply to one of the others.

That Hroshiu called out to one inside; the tanglefoot field disappeared. They moved on in without difficulty.

When Mr. Kiku, Sergei Greenberg, and Dr. Ftaeml arrived, they found an armed truce, tense on both sides. All the Hroshii were back inside the broken barrier; military craft in quantity had replaced the police patrol and far overhead, out of sight, bombers were ready in final extremity to turn the area into a radioactive desert.

The Secretary General and the Chief of Staff met them at the barricade. The Secretary General looked grave. "Ah, Henry. It seems we have failed."

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Mr. Kiku looked out at the massed Hroshii. "Perhaps."

The Chief of Staff added, "We are evacuating the blast radius as rapidly as possible. But if we have to do it, I don't know what we can do for those two youngsters in there."

"Then let's not do anything, shall we? Not yet."

"I don't think you understand the seriousness of the situation, Mr. Under Secretary. For example, we placed an immobilizing locus entirely around this area. It's gone. They canceled it out."

"So. Perhaps *you* do not understand the seriousness of the situation, General. In any case, a few words can do no harm. Come, Sergei. Coming, Doctor?" Mr. Kiku left the group around the Secretary General and headed for the break in the barricade. Wind sweeping across the miles-wide field forced him to clutch his hat. "I do not like wind," he complained to Dr. Ftaeml. "It is disorderly."

They were approaching the solid mass of Hroshii around Lummox. They could make out the two humans on the back of the Hroshia a good hundred yards beyond. Kiku stopped. "Tell them to get out of my way. I wish to approach the Hroshia Lummox."

Ftaeml translated. Nothing happened, though the Hroshii stirred uneasily. Greenberg said, "Boss, how about asking Lummox and the kids to come out here? That crowd doesn't smell friendly."

"No. I dislike shouting into this wind. Please call out to the Stuart lad and tell him to have them make way."

"Okay, boss. It will be fun to tell my grandchildren — if I have grandchildren." He shouted, "Johnnie! John Stuart! Tell Lummox to have them clear a path."

A path wide enough for a column of troops opened as if swept with a broom. The little procession moved down the ranks of Hroshii. Greenberg felt goose flesh crawl up and down his back.

Mr. Kiku's only worry seemed to be keeping his hat on in the wind. He swore primly while clutching at his head. They stopped in front of Lummox. "Howdy, Mr. Kiku," John Thomas called out. "Shall we come down?"

"Perhaps it would be best."

Johnnie slid off, then caught Betty. "Sorry we messed things up."

"So am I. If you did. Will you introduce me to your friend, please?"

"Oh, sure. Lummox, this is Mr. Kiku. He's a nice fellow, a friend."

"How do you do, Mr. Kiku."

"How do you do, Lummox." Mr. Kiku looked thoughtful. "Doctor, is not that the commander, there by the Hroshia? The one with the ugly glint in his eye?"

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The Rargyllian looked. "Yes, it is he."

"Um. Ask him if he has reported the conference to his mistress."

"Very well." The medusoid spoke to the Hroshij commander, was answered. "He says not."

"Um. John Thomas, we concluded a treaty with the Hroshii to permit all that I discussed with you. Suddenly they repudiated the agreement when they discovered that we would not surrender your person without guarantees. Will you help me find out if such were the wishes of your friend?"

"You mean Lummox? Sure."

"Very well. Wait a moment. Dr. Ftaeml, will you report the essentials of our agreement to the Hroshia Lummox — in the presence of the commander? Or are the concepts beyond her?"

"Eh? Why should they be? She was perhaps two hundred of your years old when she was brought here."

"So much? Well, speak ahead."

The Rargyllian commenced the curious whines of the Hroshij tongue, addressing Lummox. Once or twice Lummox interrupted, then allowed him to continue. When Dr. Ftaeml had finished she spoke to the expedition commander. Ftaeml said to the humans, "She asks, 'Can this be true?' "

The commander made as wide a circle as space permitted, crept up in front of her, with the little group representing the Federation giving way. His legs were retracted so that he crawled like a caterpillar. Without lifting his head from the ground he whined his answer.

"He is admitting the truth but pleading necessity."

"I wish he would hurry with it," Kiku fretted. "I'm getting chilly." His thin knees trembled.

"She is not accepting the explanation. I will spare you the exact tenor of her language — but her rhetoric is superb."

Suddenly Lummox spat out one squeal, then reared up with four legs clear of the ground. With arms retracted she swung down her head and struck the unfortunate commander a smashing sidewise blow.

It lifted him off the ground, bowled him into the crowd. Slowly he regained his feet, slunk back to the spot in front of Lummox.

Lummox began to speak. "She is saying — I wish you could hear this in *her* language! — that so long as the Galaxy shall last the friends of Johnnie are her friends. She adds that those who are not friends of her friends are nothing, less than nothing, never to be suffered in her sight. She commands this in the names of — it is a recitation of her ancestry with all its complicated branches and is somewhat tedious. Shall I attempt to translate?"

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"Don't bother," Mr. Kiku told him. " 'Yes' is 'yes' in any language."

"But she tells it with great beauty," Ftaeml said. "She is recalling to them things dreadful and wonderful, reaching far into the past."

"I am interested only in how it affects the future — and in getting out of this pesky wind." Mr. Kiku sneezed. "Oh dear!"

Dr. Ftaeml took his cape off and hung it around Mr. Kiku's narrow shoulders. "My friend — my brother. I am sorry."

"No, no, you will be cold."

"Not I."

"Let us share it, then."

"I am honored," the medusoid answered softly, his tendrils twitching with emotion. He spread it around them and they huddled together while Lummox finished her peroration. Betty turned to Johnnie.

While speaking Lummox had stayed reared up. As the oration progressed the assembled Hroshii sank down, retracting their legs until they were all in the humble position of the commander. At last it was over and Lummox added one sharp remark. The Hroshii stirred and began to move. "She says," translated Ftaeml, "that she now wishes to be alone with her friends."

"Ask her," directed Kiku, "please to assure her friend John Thomas that all she has said is true and binding."

"Very well." As the other Hroshii hurried away Ftaeml spoke briefly to Lummox.

Lummox listened, then turned to John Thomas. Out of the great mouth came the piping, little-girl voice. "That's right, Johnnie. Cross my heart."

XVII

"Send her in."

Mr. Kiku composed himself nervously, giving the tea tray one last glance, making sure that the intimate little conference room was all that he wished of it. While he was thus fussing a door dilated and Betty Sorenson walked in, said sweetly, "Hello, Mr. Kiku," and seated herself with composure.

He said, "How do you do, Miss Sorenson?"

"Call me Betty. My friends all do."

"Thank you. I would wish to be one." He looked her over and shuddered. Betty had been experimenting with a new design of bars; it made her face somewhat like a checker board. Besides that she had evidently been shopping and was dressed in styles far too old for her. Mr. Kiku was forced to remind himself that customs varied. "Um . . . my dear young

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lady, the purpose of this consultation is somewhat difficult to explain."

"Make it easy on yourself. I'm in no hurry."

"I trust you have been enjoying your stay?"

"Oh my, yes! I've never been able to shop before without counting pennies. Everybody should have an expense account."

"Enjoy it. I assure you it will never show in the annual budget . . . literally. Our discretionary fund. Uh, you are an orphan, are you not?"

"A legal orphan. I'm a Free Child. My guardian is the Westville Home for Free Children. Why?"

"Then you are not of age?"

"Depends on how you look at it. I think I am, the court says I'm not. But it won't be long now, thank goodness."

"Um, yes. Perhaps I should say that I knew all this."

"I figured you did. What's it all about?"

"Um. Perhaps I should tell a little story. Did you ever raise rabbits? Or cats?"

"I've had cats."

"We have run into a difficulty with the Hroshia we know as Lummox. Nothing disastrous; our treaty with them is not affected, since she has given her word. But, uh, shall we say that if we could oblige Lummox in a certain matter, it would make for better feelings, better future relations?"

"I suppose we shall say so, if you say so. What is it, Mr. Kiku?"

"Um. We are both aware that this Hroshia Lummox has long been a pet of John Thomas Stuart."

"Why, certainly. It worked out funny, didn't it?"

"Um, yes. And that Lummox was the pet of John Thomas's father before him, and so on for four generations."

"Yes, of course."

"Now, that is the point of view of John Thomas and his forebears. But there are always at least two points of view. From the viewpoint of Lummox he . . . she . . . was not a pet. Quite the contrary. John Thomas was *her* pet. Lummox was engaged in raising John Thomases."

Betty's eyes widened, then she started to laugh and choked. "Mr. Kiku! Oh *no!*"

"I am quite serious. It is a matter of viewpoint and made more reasonable by considering relative lifetimes. Lummox had raised several generations of John Thomases. It was Lummox's only hobby and principal interest. Childish, but Lummox was, and still is, a child."

Betty got herself under control to the point where she could talk through giggles. " 'Raising John Thomases.' Does Johnnie know about this?

"Well, yes, but I explained it to him somewhat differently.

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"To continue: Lummox appears to have been perfectly happy with this innocent hobby. It was the Hroshia's intention to continue it indefinitely. That was the reason that we found ourself faced with this curious dilemma of being unable to get the Hroshii to leave after their scion had been restored. Lummox wished to continue, uh, raising John Thomases." He hesitated.

Finally Betty said, "Well, Mr. Kiku? Go on."

"Uh, what are your own plans, Betty . . . Miss Sorenson?"

"Mine? I haven't discussed them with anyone."

"Um. Pardon me if I was unduly personal. You see, there are requirements in any endeavor and Lummox, it appears, is aware of one of the requirements . . . uh, let's put it this way. If we have here a rabbit — or a cat —" He stopped dead, unable to go on.

She searched his unhappy face. "Mr. Kiku, are you trying to say that it takes two rabbits —"

"Well, yes. That was part of it."

"Now, really! Why make such a fuss about it? I suppose the rest is that Lummox knows that the same rule applies to John Thomases?"

He could only nod dumbly.

"You poor dear, you should have written me a note about it. It would have been less of a strain on you. I suppose I'll have to help you with the rest, too. You thought I might figure in this plan?"

"I had no wish to intrude . . . but I did want to sound out your intentions."

"Am I going to marry John Thomas? I've never had any other intention. Of course."

Mr. Kiku sighed. "Thank you."

"Thank Lummie."

"I take it that this is all settled?"

"Huh? I haven't proposed to him yet. I was waiting until it was a little nearer time for the ship to leave. You know how men are . . . nervous and skittery. I didn't want to leave him time to worry. Did your wife propose to you right off? Or did she wait until you were ripe for the kill?"

"Uh, well, the customs of my people are somewhat different. Her father arranged it with my father."

Betty looked shocked. "Slavery," she stated baldly.

"No doubt. However I have not been unhappy under it." He stood up. "I'm glad that we have concluded our talk so amiably."

"Just a moment, Mr. Kiku. There are one or two other matters. Just what are you doing for John Thomas?"

"Eh?"

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"What's the contract?"

"Oh. Financially we mean to be liberal. He will devote most of his time to his education, but I had thought of giving him a nominal title in the embassy — special attaché, or assistant secretary, or some such."

Betty remained silent.

"Of course, since you are going along, it might be well to give you a semi-official status, too. Say special aide, with the same salary? It would give you two a nice nest egg if you return . . . when you return."

She shook her head. "Johnnie isn't ambitious. I am."

"Yes?"

"Johnnie is to be ambassador to the Hroshii."

Mr. Kiku had grave trouble talking. At last he managed to say, "My dear young lady! Quite impossible."

"That's what you think. Look, Mr. MacClure got cold feet and welshed on you, didn't he? Don't beat around the bush. He did. Therefore the job is open. It's for Johnnie."

"But, my dear," he said weakly, "it is not a job for an untrained boy — much as I think of John Thomas Stuart."

"MacClure was going to be dead wood, wasn't he? Everybody knows that. Johnnie would not be dead wood. He knows the most about Hroshii."

"My dear, I admit his special knowledge; I grant that we will make use of it. But ambassador? No."

"Yes."

"Chargé d'Affaires? That's an awfully high rank, but I'm willing to stretch a point. But Mr. Greenberg must be the ambassador. We require a diplomat."

"What's so hard about being a diplomat? Or to put it another way, what could Mr. MacClure do that my Johnnie can't do better?"

He sighed deeply. "You have me there. All I can say is that there are situations which I am forced to accept, knowing them to be wrong, and others that I need not accept. If you were my own daughter I would paddle you. No."

She grinned at him. "I'll bet I outweigh you. But that's not the point. I don't think you understand the situation."

"No?"

"No. Johnnie and I are important to you in this dicker, aren't we? especially Johnnie."

"Yes. Especially Johnnie. You are not essential — even in the, uh, raising of John Thomases."

"Want to put it to a test? Do you think you can get John Thomas Stuart one half inch off this planet if I set myself against it?"

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"Hmm . . . I wonder."

"So do I. But I've got nerve enough to put it to a trial. If I win, where are you? Out on a windy field, trying to talk your way out of a mess again — without Johnnie to help you."

Mr. Kiku went over to a window and looked out. Presently he turned. "More tea?" Betty asked politely.

"Thank you, no. Miss, do you know what an ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary is?"

"I've heard the term."

"It is the same rank and pay as an ambassador, except that it is a special case. This is a special case. Mr. Greenberg will be the ambassador and carry the authority; the special, and purely nominal, rank will be created for John Thomas."

"Rank *and* pay."

"And pay," he agreed. "Young lady, you have the morals of a snapping turtle and the crust of a bakery pie. Very well, it's a deal — if you can get your young man to agree to it."

She giggled. "I won't have any trouble."

"I didn't mean that. I'm betting on his horsé sense and natural modesty against your avarice. I think he'll settle for assistant embassy secretary. We'll see."

"Oh. Yes, we'll see. By the way, where is he?"

"Eh?"

"He's not at the hotel. You have him here, don't you?"

"He is here, as a matter of fact."

"Good." She walked up and patted him on the cheek. "I like you, Mr. Kiku. Now trot Johnnie in here and leave us alone. It will take me about twenty minutes. You don't have a thing to worry about."

"Miss Sorenson," Mr. Kiku asked wonderingly, "how does it happen that you did not ask to be ambassador yourself?"

Lummox was the only non-human to attend the wedding. Mr. Kiku stood up for the bride. He noticed that she was wearing no make-up, which made him wonder if possibly the embassy's junior secretary might not be master in his own home after all.

They received the usual ninety-seven pickle dishes, mostly from strangers, and other assorted costly junk that they would not take with them, including an all-expense trip to Hawaii. Mrs. Stuart wept and had her picture taken and greatly enjoyed herself; all in all it was a very successful wedding. Mr. Kiku leaked a few tears during the responses, but Mr. Kiku was a very sentimental man.

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He was sitting at his desk the next morning, ignoring lights, with his Kenya-farm brochures spread out before him, but he was not looking at them. Dr. Ftaeml and he had gone out together and done the town after they got the kids safely married . . . and Mr. Kiku was feeling it somewhat, in a pleasant, relaxed manner. Even though his head buzzed and his coordination was poor, his stomach was not troubling him. He felt fine.

He was trying fuzzily to sum up the affair in his mind. All this fuss, all this grief, because some fool spaceman more than a century ago didn't have sense enough not to tamper with native life until protocol had been worked out. Oh my people, my people!

On second thought, he told himself not to point the finger of scorn; he might be looking in a mirror.

There was something that good old Ftaeml had said last night . . . something — Now what was it he had said? Something which, at the time, convinced Kiku that the Hroshii never had had any weapons capable of seriously damaging Earth. Of course a Rargyllian would not lie, not professionally — but would one skate around the truth in order to conclude successfully a negotiation which seemed about to fail?

Well, since it had all been settled without violence he could only wonder. Just as well, perhaps.

Besides, the next heathens to show up might *not* be bluffing.

Mildred's voice came to him. "Mr. Kiku, the Randavian delegation is waiting."

"Tell them I'm moulting!"

"Sir?"

"Never mind. Tell them I'll be right in. East conference room."

He sighed, decided to treat himself to just one pill, then got up and headed for the door, ready to stick his finger in another hole in the dike. Chinese obligation, he thought; once you take it on you can't drop it.

But he still felt cheerful and sang a snatch of the only song he knew all the way through: "— *this story has no moral, this story has no end. This story only goes to show that there ain't no good in men.*"

In the meantime, out at the space port, the new Secretary for Spatial Affairs was seeing off the noble Hroshii. Her Imperial Highness, the Infanta of that race, 213th of her line, heiress to the matriarchy of the Seven Suns, future ruler over nine billion of her own kind, and lately nicknamed "Lummox" contentedly took her pair of pets aboard the imperial yacht.

THE END

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Randy Garrett, Parodist Laureate of Peoria, has the agreeable habit of uttering truths in the guise of absurdity. His I've Got a Little List *(F&SF, November, 1953) ventured some acute observations on modern science fiction in the form of a Gilbertian patter song; and this, the ultimate spoofing reduction of all parallel-universe stories, manages, we think, to convey more of the mathematical implications of* ∞ *(infinity, to the layman) than any of its earnest predecessors.*

Infinite Resources

by RANDALL GARRETT

AT THE BAR of the Green Lizard Lounge, Dr. Rumfort was saying: "In my forthcoming monograph to the *Journal*, I show that it is mathematically possible to describe a six-dimensional continuum in which —" His voice trailed off as he noticed that Latimer was no longer listening.

Irritated, he swiveled his head to follow Latimer's gaze.

The oddly dressed gentleman was wearing a long blue cutaway coat, a pair of white shorts that half covered his thighs, long crimson hose that came up to his knees, and a soft white shirt that had no collar. His head was completely shaved.

On his back, he carried something that looked like a walkie-talkie radio with a peculiar antenna.

"What is it?" whispered Latimer.

Rumfort frowned. "A nut," he said, turning back to his drink.

The man peered around in the dimness of the bar and then headed directly towards Latimer. "Oh, I do say," he said worriedly, "could you very possibly be Dr. Oswald Latimer?"

Latimer nodded, grinning. "I am."

"*The* Dr. Latimer? The expert on the mathematics of infinity?"

"That's me." Latimer was still grinning.

"Thank Heavens I've found you!" he breathed. "I have the honor to be Professor George Featherby, of Columbia."

Rumfort swiveled his head around again. "Ridiculous! There's no such person at Columbia!" He had never approved of the manner in which Latimer took up with strangers so easily.

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"Oh, no, of course not," Featherby said. "Not in this continuum. Dr. Latimer, do you mind if I ask a few questions?"

Rumfort butted in before Latimer had a chance to answer.

"What do you mean, 'in this continuum'?"

Featherby beamed broadly. "Well, you see, I'm not actually from this space-time continuum. This apparatus —" he jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate the pack on his back "— this apparatus is capable of shifting its wearer from one of an infinite series of universes to another."

Dr. Rumfort snorted again.

Latimer, who was enjoying the screwy little man immensely, nodded his understanding. "Yes. Dr. Rumfort, here, was just saying that he has proved mathematically that there are such things as parallel continua."

Rumfort almost choked on his drink. "That, sir, was only an exercise in mathematics! It does not necessarily pertain to the real universe!"

"Ah, there, old chap," smiled Featherby, "but it does, you know!"

"Ridiculous!" Rumfort snapped. He turned back to his drink, thus dismissing the subject entirely. Then he pulled a notebook and pencil out of his pocket and began to scribble furiously.

"That's very interesting," said Latimer to Featherby. "I suppose each continuum is different from the others, eh?"

"Oh, no! Rather not! Infinite number of universes, you know, so there's an infinite number of 'em all exactly alike. Of course, there's an infinite number of 'em that are different, too, so you're right, in a way. But, then, that's why I've come to you, you know."

Latimer didn't know, but he nodded and lit a cigarette. "Go on."

"Well, sir, you see, I'm lost. Lost! I hadn't learned how to control this blasted thing at first, and I got myself too far away from my own continuum." Featherby looked desolate. "Ours is rather different from this, you see. But I finally heard of you in another continuum. Unfortunately, you'd been killed in an — uh — is it automobile? — yes, automobile accident in 1952. So I had to come looking for you in one where you'd survived."

Latimer blinked. He still had a deep scar on his chest from that accident. Then he grinned again; the little guy had read the papers, of course. "I'm glad you found me. How can I help you?"

"Well, sir, I understand you know a great deal about the mathematics of infinity; I thought perhaps you might tell me, if you could, how to get home."

Latimer looked at the ceiling, chuckling inwardly.

"Well, you say there are an infinite number of universes. That would, as you say, imply an infinite number of *different* universes, each of which is infinitely duplicated, identically.

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"I should say that it would be a first-order, or aleph-null infinity. For instance, a line has an infinite number of points on it, a plane contains an infinite number of lines, and a solid contains an infinite number of planes. That should, it would seem, indicate that a solid had infinity-cubed points in it. But infinity cubed is still infinity, so a line has the same number of points as a solid."

"Yes, yes," said Featherby impatiently. "I know all that! You're talking to a Professor of Physics! — Pardon me, but I *am* impatient, you know." He looked contrite.

"The point I'm getting at," said Latimer, unruffled, "is that you really don't have to get back to the same universe you left. If the one you go back to is identical, you wouldn't know the difference. Hmmmmm — still — By George!" His face broke into a grin.

"What is it? What?" Featherby asked.

"Why, don't you see? That implies that *there are an infinite number of Featherbys galloping all over the metauniverse!* Also, there are an infinite number of Featherbys who stayed home. If you got into one of those continua, there'd be two of you. And if —"

"Oh, my God!" said Featherby, turning white. "How horrible!"

"Oh, come now," said Latimer, "it's not as bad as all that. Really, if —"

"Just a minute!" bellowed Dr. Rumfort, who had finished his writing in the notebook. He looked straight at Featherby. "You're a liar, and I can prove it!"

"A liar?" Featherby exploded. "A *liar*, sir? I demand satisfaction, sir! My dueller will meet yours at any time you stipulate! I — Oh, dear!"

"What's the matter?" asked Latimer.

"Dear me! This *is* awkward! I forgot I hadn't brought my private dueller along. And I can't fight one *myself*, you know!"

"That's all right. Duelling's illegal here, you know," said Latimer comfortingly.

"I said," repeated Dr. Rumfort, "that I could prove it!"

Featherby faced him, scowling. "All right, if you're so sanguinarily smart, go ahead and prove it!"

Rumfort spread a sheaf of papers arrogantly. "There; take a look. I have shown that moving from one space-time continuum to another would require instantaneous acceleration to the velocity of light!"

"All right, all right," snapped Featherby. "I admit all that. It's self-evident. So what?"

"So what? Why, my dear man, that would require an infinite amount of energy applied in an infinitesimally short time!"

"Yes, yes. Go on. Where's your proof that I'm a liar?"

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Rumfort looked baffled. "Well, dammit, you couldn't possibly carry that much power on your back!"

"Hah! Who said I carried it on my back? Who, I ask?"

"Why, *you* did! You said —"

"I said no such thing! This mechanism draws power from the Universal ether!"

Rumfort pounced on that statement as though it were the entire keystone of his argument. "AhhHAH! It has already been shown that the Universal ether does not exist! And if it did, you wouldn't be able to draw enough energy from it!

"It requires infinite energy! Infinite! That means that if you left some other continuum, you used every bit of energy in it! All the energy and all the matter in that universe would have to be used instantaneously as energy for your machine! If you had done as you said, the universe you left would be nonexistent now! And that's impossible! You, sir, are a confounded liar!"

Latimer turned to Rumfort. "For Heaven's sake, Rumfort! The poor guy's a little off his rocker! That's no reason to tease the unfortunate chap."

Featherby's face grew purple. "You! You — *argh! Liar! Off my rocker!* If only my dueller were here! Well, by gad, I haven't got to stay about and listen to your foul insults!"

He reached up and pressed a button on the control panel on his chest.

Neither Latimer nor Rumfort felt anything, of course. One can't feel anything when one is instantaneously converted into energy along with the rest of one's universe.

At the bar of the Green Lizard Lounge, Dr. Rumfort was saying: "In my forthcoming monograph to the *Journal,* I show that it is mathematically possible to describe a six-dimensional continuum in which an infinite number of points could exist, each of these points being, in reality, three-dimensional."

Latimer nodded, sipping his beer. He had been watching the door, hoping somebody interesting would come in. Anybody would be better than old Rumfort.

Nobody had come in yet, but he thought they might. After all, in an infinite number of universes, there might be somebody who . . .

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Recent developments from Moscow indicate that the mock-scientist Lysenko is out of favor — which may of course presage a change in official Marxist doctrine on genetics. But the sin which has acquired the name of Lysenkoism does not lie in believing in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, but in believing in anything *— even such an unarguable truth as that* $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ *— simply because it is an official doctrine to which the State demands unquestioning adherence. (It's a sin not confined to Russia, as some of our own scientists regrettably showed in a few markedly unscientific answers to Lysenko.) Here Mr. Grinnell postulates a broad-minded scientific effort to restudy Lysenko's theories without his politics; for a handful of obstinate facts do keep suggesting, against all other evidence, that the Chevalier de Lamarck (the Eighteenth Century French naturalist upon whose theories Lysenko has based his own) may have been right all along. And the results are such as to disturb the human advocates of either side of the Great Lysenko Controversy. . . .*

The Lysenko Maze

by DAVID GRINNELL

By mastering these means, man can create forms that did not and could not appear in nature even in millions of years.

TROFIM DENISOVICH LYSENKO

Professor Borisov had succeeded in shocking his audience. He had had their sympathy for a long time, several months in fact. Months in which he had slipped across the frontier in Finland, in the dead of winter, months in which he had hidden aboard a Finnish fishing vessel and made his way to Sweden. Months in which he had lived from hand to mouth, a refugee from a political tyranny he despised, without means, until his scientific friends in America had been able to obtain the necessary papers and this most valued post at this Corn Belt university's experimental laboratories.

And now this!

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The professor waved his hands wildly, a little upset at disturbing his newfound friends. "But of course I am not a Communist — do I have to tell you this again? Do I have to show you what I have gone through? Am I not the same man I was an hour ago, yesterday, last month? A good biologist, a good believer in democracy, in freedom of speech and conscience? *Da!* I am all that — and yet I tell you again, Lysenko is right!"

Melvin Raine shook his head. It had been his responsibility, this invitation to the refugee Russian. It would be on his head if it was now shown that they were harboring a hypocrite. Yet — what Borisov had said was so. There was little doubt of the man's honesty, of his innate personal refusal to compromise with anything he believed false. So what were they now to make of this Lysenko business? Why, how could any self-respecting scientist place credence in that charlatan — in a man of "science" who had to be bolstered up by the dictates of a Politburo of police state bureaucrats?

Raine voiced his thoughts. "And still you persist in this strange thing. You betray our intelligence with this belief in Lysenko's outmoded notions. It is sheer Lamarckism — the inheritance of acquired characteristics, disproved a hundred years in a thousand laboratories."

"Ah, no, no," the little Russian was very upset, but very positive. "It is you who do not understand. I do not approve of Lysenko's politics: he is a Communist, a Stalinist fanatic. I am a freeman, a democrat. And yet, I tell you, on this one thing he could be right and still wrong on a thousand others. And I tell you also that this one thing I have seen proved in Russia . . . proved to me, to my satisfaction."

The men gathered in Raine's rooms were silent. They were members of the faculty, biologists, teachers of animal husbandry, botanists, men of integrity, learning. It was clear that Borisov did not have the sympathy of a man there.

"Let me ask you," spoke one finally. "Do you think it was right, let us say, for science, for such a man as Galileo to be harassed for his opinions by the inquisitorial court?"

"Ah, yes," shouted Borisov, "it was wrong of the court — for in that one thing Galileo was right. But I am glad you mentioned him. Very glad. For let me ask you this: Galileo was right in believing his astronomical discoveries and for saying that the earth did move. But how many other things that Galileo personally believed were wrong? Did he not share the ignorance and bias of his time in everything else? Did he not believe in the divine right of kings, in slavery, in the permanent servility of serfs and women, in a hundred, a thousand other such outmoded evils, falsehoods? Would he not be, by our standards, a hopeless bigot, a reactionary?

"So . . . but in that one thing, Galileo was right. So . . . in this one

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thing Lysenko is right. He shares the foolishness of the state around him, but unlike the case of Galileo the fickle state chooses to uphold his one discovery and suppress his opponents. Perhaps some day Trofim Denisovich may lose his political skill, and it will be his opponents who dictate the Marxist 'Truth' concerning genetics. All this is a mere accident of politics. What has it to do with whether his discovery be true or false?"

Raine leaned forward. He looked at the man, studied him. Borisov's blue eyes were plainly distressed, his face was lined and working. His prematurely gray hair was awry. Yes, the American decided, this man was on the level. Borisov meant what he said, and because he was implicitly honest, he had said it.

"If," and Raine weighed his words carefully, "you have seen proof that Lysenko's theories of evolution and the heredity of acquired characteristics do work, would you be willing to conduct an experiment *here* — under *our* conditions — to prove it again?"

Borisov frowned, ran a hand through his hair. "Yes."

"Then suppose we meet tomorrow and work out the details of this experiment to our mutual satisfaction?"

"Why wait until tomorrow? Let us decide right here upon this experiment. After all, in dealing with generations we may have to need several years for this. . . . Have you any suggestions?"

One of the biology men spoke up, a sly smile on his lips. "What would you say to repeating Weismann's experiment with mice? Shall we breed a race of tailless mice?"

Borisov turned, shook a finger. "Now that is exactly what I mean when I say you do not know what Lysenko is doing. Weismann tried to disprove Lamarck by cutting off the tails of twenty-two generations of mice. And the last generation was born with just the same long tails as the first! Aha, you all say, this proves that you cannot inherit acquired changes! And then you all will get busy saying that Chinese women bound their feet for thousands of years and still were born with normal feet! Aha, you then add, this double proves it! And all that it proves is nothing! Nothing at all, except that nature sneers at foolishness."

He stopped, gathered his breath. "Let me explain and please listen. The mice did not lose their tails because there was no practical reason for them to lose their tails, there was no need for taillessness, there was no environmental necessity for it, it was pointless, senseless, useless. So the mouse breed simply ignored Weismann's scalpel. The Chinese women were helpless with their feet bound. Their organism rejected that foolishness. Even if an artificial society wanted it, the body knew better.

"Now please understand this. A body, a plant, an animal will pass on an

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acquired characteristic only when that new characteristic has been acquired by the individual in answer to an *urgent need* of the system to maintain itself. A seed that falls in a strange climate either adapts itself to that climate or it dies. If it adapts itself, it passes on its adaptation to its descendants, or they die. Burbank knew this. Plant growers know this. Only foolish college biologists do not know this."

"How about mutations?" said Raine. "You know that the means for the creation of new species has been shown to be by the mutation of the germ cell, by alteration of the chromosomes. In the course of survival, only those mutant individuals who have a beneficial quality from this genetic accident will live."

"This is not so. Consider the cavern fish," said Borisov. "This is a thing you Americans discovered. But you ignore it in your fine theories. These fish, found in lightless caverns, have no eyes. But you take them out and breed them in lighted waters, and, presto, in a few generations the eyes are back. Why? Obviously these fish originally became trapped in these caverns. In lightlessness, their eyes were useless — worse, being sensitive, they were a handicap, a menace to their life. Hence they retracted, generation by generation, atrophied, until they were born in that atrophied submerged condition. But back in the light, the need for eyes reasserted itself, and the eyes returned in a few generations. This is not mutation, no."

He paused, held up a hand. "Now in this experiment, you must forget these tailless mice. If you use mice, you must create a condition which will make them change to survive. Which will make them force the acquisition of some quality their young will need to have also. You will see. So I suggest this: why not intelligence? We will force the mice to use their brains. We will breed thinking mice, because maybe that will be the easiest experiment for us."

Raine nodded. "I do not believe it will work. But that will be an acceptable basis."

Raine and Borisov and several others worked out the details of the experiment, and within a month the scene was set.

The men who had met that original night gathered at an old farmhouse several miles from the town. The farm and its dilapidated house had been acquired years ago by the college, which had thus far failed to make use of it. Raine and Borisov showed the men in. The interior of the house had been torn out, until the building was like a huge barn, only a hollow shell. It was hard to describe its present contents, save that it looked like nothing so much as a giant abdomen, tightly packed with criss-crossed and interlaced intestines, made of tubes ranging from three to ten inches in diameter,

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some transparent, some translucent, some plastic black. The interior of the house, save for a few corners, a few observation posts set on platforms here and there, was a closed and vastly complex structure of these tubes. The men stared in amazement.

Borisov explained. "We intend to breed mice to have cunning and quickness of thought. This also is an inherited characteristic. We will breed a race of mice that can make deductions, put two and two together, estimate for tomorrow.

"You see, here is Lysenko's law as he condenses it." He took out a little gray-covered pamphlet, found a place, and translated: "*The alteration of requirements, that is of the heredity of a living body, always reflects the specific effects of conditions of the external environment, provided that they are assimilated by it.*

"Now we have created an external environment for these mice. It is this maze, closed from the outside world in every way, and the mice will live and breed entirely within it. We have created, in accord with Lysenko's theory, conditions within this maze which will force the change in the species of mice for the creation of intelligence. That is this. This maze of pipes, which is their home, is basically not too different from the dark holes and cracks they would inhabit in houses. This maze of pipes is full of tricks. It is movable. It will shift its tubes, change connections, in accord with a mathematical rhythm. Systematically, in increasingly complex cycles, the various entry places for food will shift. Day by day they will change, but they will repeat in cycles which the mouse should be able to determine, at first, without too much delay.

"At first the mice will become confused, for to obtain water they must come to one place, salt another, meat a third, fruit a fourth, and so on. And within the lifetime of each mouse they will see the regular alternation of these places. They will have to learn to determine the next day's alternation in advance, for there will never be enough food for all. As this goes on, as future generations come into existence, the pattern will become more complex, new problems will be added, dangers will be placed in the tubes. These mice will have to force themselves to acquire greater and greater skill at solving problems or die out."

He paused for breath. The men looked at the bewildering maze of tubes, probably miles of it crowded into the space within the wooden farm walls. "There will be lighting cycles within the tubes. There will be heat and cold spells. Mostly there will not be enough heat, by the third or fourth generation surely. But they will have the raw means for making heat, if they can learn to use them. There are special phases through which their development must operate. Light, heat. We are going to give them more oxygen

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than in the normal atmosphere; this will assist them to think and move faster. Professor Raine has agreed to it. We are even going to feed them supplies of a milk formula at first, which is chemically similar to human milk. Lysenko claims that the sap of a foster-parent plant can influence the heredity of a grafted twig from another species. This is permissible in the experiment."

They looked over the maze. Raine unrolled the plans for it, explained the various subtleties, showed them the machinery for operating it, the schedules of food and heat alternations, for creating "season" within the sealed mouse world.

"Professor Borisov and I have our distinct opinions on how this will end. I say that his twentieth generation of mice will be as ignorant as his first, that they will not pass on any basic cunning to their offspring. I say further that if anything strange should develop, I will prove that it is by mutation and that it will display the evidence of it on its own body."

Borisov shrugged. "You will see. By the way, gentlemen, we are not using laboratory white mice here. We agree that their albinism and their artificial breeding does not correspond with nature's norm. We are starting this experiment with wild gray house mice, captured in the city itself. And — we begin the experiment now."

He opened a valve in a large tube, took a box from which excited squeaks were coming and lifted a shutter at the box's side, which he had pressed against the tube's opening. There was a scurrying of little feet as the mice rushed through. Another box was lifted. "The females, now," and another scurrying of feet.

"And now we shall see."

A half year later, Borisov and Raine stood on the upper observation post near the roof of the old house, watching the movements of the little gray mice through the sides of a transparent wide tube. The entry point for fruit was at that spot that hour, and they had just placed the supply there. No mice were in sight when they had done so, but within three minutes there was a flash of gray and a mouse was at the food, turning it over, nibbling. Then, in a few seconds, there were several mice, and shortly after, a crowd.

Raine snapped his watch shut. "About the same time as yesterday," he said. "Not bad. May have been luck."

Borisov finger his chin. "Or it may have been an old and experienced mouse simply on the prowl. But I think that first one had figured out where the entry would be."

Raine leaned over, watching the stream of mice that was now coming and going. "The trouble is that several generations are alive at once. But it does seem true that the younger mice seem to be edging the older ones out."

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"But," said Borisov, "just to argue your point, this could be merely agility."

He noted the time in a large notebook, one of the many which had been used in the short time so far. There had been a period within the first few weeks when the mice had had very great difficulty in finding the food in time. Many of the original ones had certainly died in that time, starved, or been eaten by their hungry fellows. But definitely they had overcome this original handicap. Of that there could be no doubt. But was this the development of intelligence or was it merely a system of having sentinels dispersed widely at all possible points? This angle had not occurred to them before.

However, the next steps were already planned. This was a system of new barriers. When the next food entry points came around in the complex schedule, there would be additional problems to be solved. But the question was still as to whether this was merely a system of food scouts set up by the older generations and picked up by example by the new ones. It was hard to tell. . . .

In the next year, Borisov and Raine became more and more baffled. The mice seemed to have established a fairly standard time for the discovery of the rhythmically changing food spots. It took usually about two and a half minutes for discovery and rarely varied. The total number of mice did not seem to be increasing, but was apparently stationary. There was no longer any practical way of determining how many mice were in the entire maze, but they knew that only a certain limit could be supported.

However, what they could see of the mice did not seem to indicate any noticeable physical changes. They did not remove any of the little animals, for the test demanded that the mouse maze be sealed and stay that way.

It was about two and a quarter years later, about the time that a twentieth generation might have been in the tubes, that Raine first spotted the blue mouse. It had originally made its appearance at one of the food entries among the first five to find it. By that time the mathematical shifting of the ports had assumed a complexity that would have confused humans and would have required a whole month's records to determine its next shifts. Yet the mice kept on spotting the shifts in time.

Raine pointed out the blue mouse to the Russian. They were again on the upper observation platform. This mouse was actually slightly larger, possibly longer, and his fur was quite definitely more bluish than gray. The tail appeared to be shorter and in some ways he seemed faster.

"Look at that," whispered Raine. "Look at that! Could that be a result?"

Borisov pursed his lips. He had been getting a bit uneasy about the experi-

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ment. Even though they were trying for intelligence and not physical change, he had expected that some physical changes would occur as a corollary to the greater brain ability. Man knew too little of nature to predict all the factors that might accompany a change in the direction of a being's existence. Yet all he had seen had been little gray mice that never seemed any different to the eye. But this . . . well . . .

Raine went on, "That mouse has all the appearance of a mutant. An irrelevant color change, an unusual variation in size and length. If it is also intelligent, would it not prove my point and not yours?"

Borisov was shaken more than he would care to admit. "Still," he said, "there might be a factor within the tubes that we do not understand which called forth these changes. We should avoid conclusions until the experiment is over. Should we check the controls, the heat, the inside atmosphere?"

"Hardly necessary," said Raine. "They are checked automatically. The conditions are as set and haven't changed. The experiment is approaching its end soon, anyway. We shall soon see."

They watched for the blue mouse day after day and soon came to find it instantly, for it was always among the very first to reach a new food port. Undoubtedly, they realized, here was the first proof that it was not a simple question of mass scouting; for here was an individual who always knew in advance. This one blue mouse must have been able to figure out the now complex mathematical formula for rotation — a pattern which by now would have caused most humans very considerable trouble. Borisov, though, did point out the possibility that there were really many blue mice, a whole generation of them, as the final product of the experiment. But in that case, why was it they never saw more than one of the creatures?

The mouse apparently saw them. For unlike its gray fellows it did not busy itself about the food, carrying the food away into the dark recesses of the tubes. Instead the blue mouse had taken to looking outwards, through the glass walls, at them. That was a sign of intelligence, unquestionably.

Now the two experimenters became excited. They speculated on this strange mouse, on what it was doing. For they both had come to regard it as the key to the whole experiment.

More and more the blue mouse seemed obsessed with watching them. Now they noticed once that it dragged something with it towards the transparent food port of that day. Something of straw and shreds. What it was for they could not surmise. Another time the mouse came with a bit of shiny stuff in its jaws. And once Borisov had seen the mouse watching him from a section of the tubes, where no food was expected, simply watching him because from there Borisov could be seen at his desk in a corner of the frame house where he kept the records.

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When the trouble came, Raine and Borisov were standing near that desk checking the day's figures. It was night outside, but the lights within the tubes followed their own orbits and at this moment the sealed world of the Lysenko maze was theoretically at "late spring, mid-day." Borisov had noticed the blue mouse watching their desk from the section of pipe nearest them when he had first entered the building, but he had come to expect that. He was reading off the day's lists, when the lights suddenly flickered.

The two men looked up. "What is happening?" "Is it the dynamo?" Power for the experiment came from the college lines, but there was an emergency dynamo that was supposed to cut in should this power fail. It had not cut in, nor had the regular power failed, yet the lights had flickered.

There was a sound of scurrying within the tubes. A sound as if all the myriad mice within were assembling in one spot nearest them. They saw at that transparent section that this was so, for hundreds of beady eyes were looking out at them and the blue mouse was there in their midst.

Now the lights flickered again, there was a crackling sound, sparks leaped through the air, and the tube fell apart at the point! The men leaped to their feet as a horde of little beasts poured through. There was a smell of smoke, and as the two men rushed into the outside darkness, they saw that the farmhouse was ablaze.

They stood on a knoll watching the building, its records, and the intricate Lysenko maze burning to ashes. Raine grasped Borisov's arm. "You failed. The Lysenko experiment was a failure. It was that blue mouse, you know. And do you know what that blue mouse was?"

The Russian stared at the fire. "It was certainly intelligent. It certainly had contrived a short-circuit, it managed to get all the mice to unite in breaking out. So it was intelligent, and its intelligence came out of the experiment."

"That mouse," shouted Raine triumphantly, "that mouse was *not* like the others! It was a *mutation*, a 'supermouse,' a mutant freak with no relation to its ancestors nor to this foolish experiment!"

"*Da, da*," said the Russian, shaking his head. "I see your point. It makes sense. Those other mice, I have seen them too often. They hadn't changed, they were just gray mice who spread all over the tube confusing all our clever rotations." He sighed deeply.

"Heredity," said Raine, standing in the darkness watching the house burn, "cannot be changed by acquired characteristics. The only mouse that varied, that was above the norm in any way, was simply a freak of nature, an accident of the chromosomes, a mutant, and, one that, thank heavens, was probably sterile, since we saw no other bluish mice turning up."

Borisov nodded his head sadly. And sitting on the branches of a bush, in

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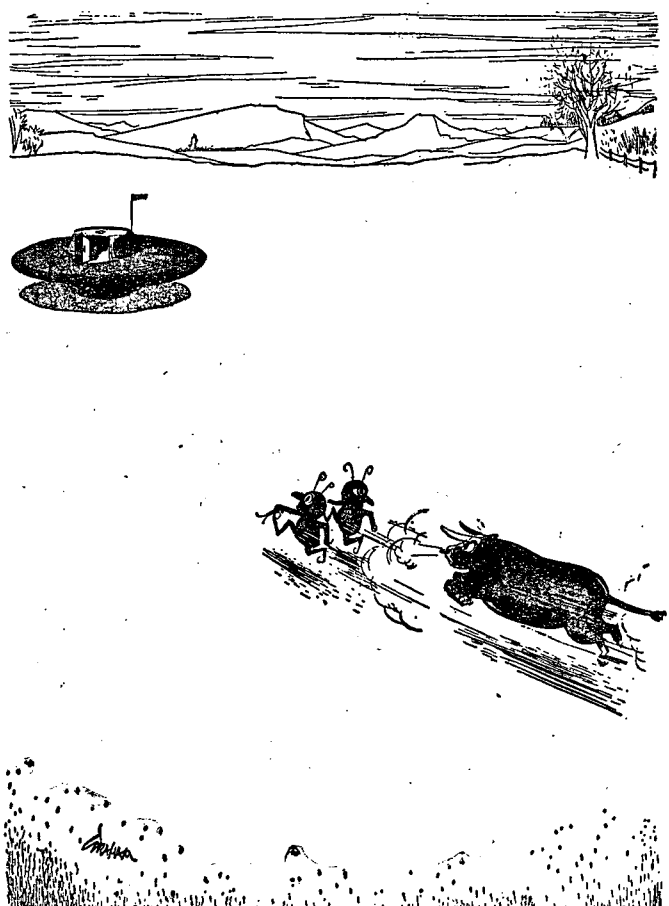
close proximity and a little behind him, three gray mice nodded their heads in agreement. Their prehensile fingers, curled around little bits of sharpened nutshells, carefully noted on scrolls of dried skin what their thought-wave-sensitive brains had just picked up. It was good to know that their opinion of their eccentric blue brother with the dictator complex was verified by the Outside Thinkers. Now they could dispose of his troublesome body in peace and get to work in the real wide world.



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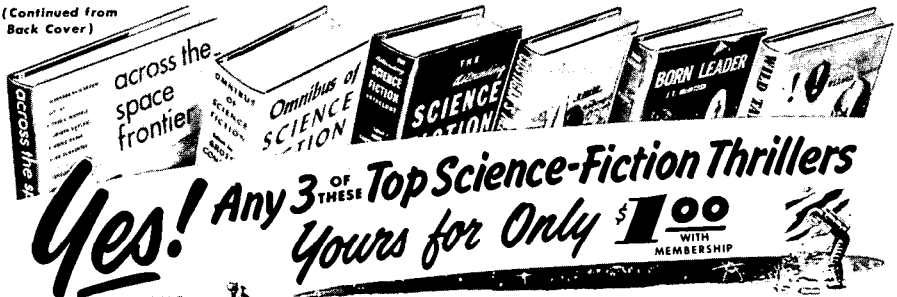
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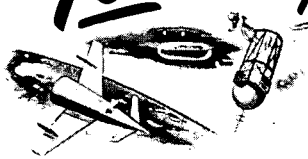

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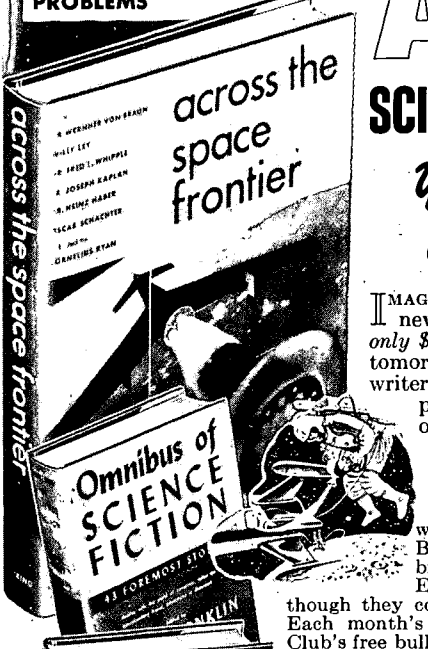

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